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The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre: Music Directing Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey's 'Next to Normal'

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**THE ART OF MUSIC DIRECTION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL THEATRE:
MUSIC DIRECTING TOM KITT AND BRIAN YORKEY'S *NEXT TO NORMAL***

by

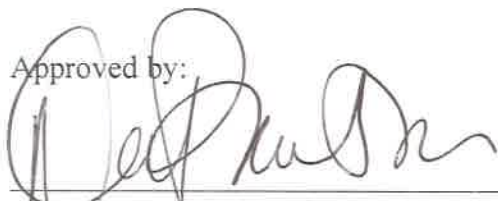
Alex J. Golden

A Proposal Submitted to the Honors Council

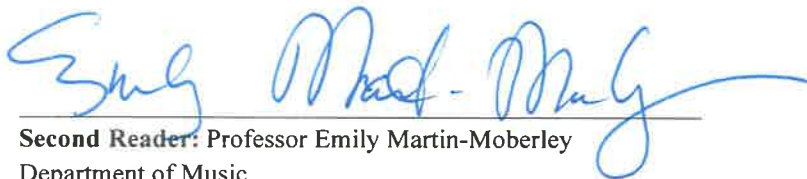
For Honors in Theatre

May 10, 2017

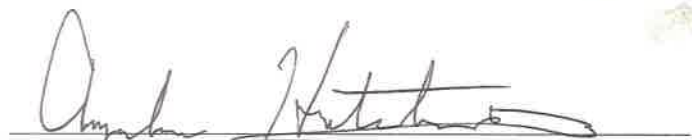
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Acknowledgments

As John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island.” This is especially true for those of us working in the art of theatre, whose very essence lies in the collaboration between artist and designer, artist and creative team, and artist and audience. So with that in mind, I must take a moment to acknowledge the many people who have helped me in this massive undertaking, and without whom *Next to Normal* would have never gotten off the ground.

First, I need to thank the Department of Theatre and Dance for giving me this incredibly special opportunity. The faculty took a risk in granting me this senior project; a student had not taken on a musical as an independent study anytime in recent history, and I knew I was asking a lot of the department in terms of faculty design assistance and budget. I am grateful every day for their faith in me, and for their help and support throughout these past two semesters.

Professor Gary Grant was the first faculty member I approached about this project during my first year at Bucknell. Although he cautioned me that a student had never been allowed to pursue a musical as an independent study before, instead of discouraging me from the project, he asked me detailed questions over the next two years to help me refine my ideas and proposal, and discussed the project at length with the rest of the department faculty before I submitted my official proposal. His support, guidance, and direction over my time at Bucknell has meant the world to me. I would not be the actor and director I am today without him. Similarly, I would not have been half as successful as a student here with Professor Anjalee Hutchinson’s incredible life advice. Her calm, wise presence has guided me through many a difficult situation.

Without my thesis advisor, Professor Dustyn Martincich, *Next to Normal* could never have happened. Despite her self-professed initial dislike for contemporary musicals, when the department expressed hesitation at approving my project without a faculty stage director to assist me while I music directed, Dustyn immediately volunteered, even knowing the immense time commitment and energy that would be spent on the project. I have had nothing but the most positive of experiences working with Dustyn; I learned so much from watching her direct, and collaborating with her to bring song and scene together was one of my great joys in this project. The fact that she dedicated four hours a night to us after having just had a baby makes all of this even more impressive.

I also need to thank my unbelievable team working on this project with me. My stage manager, Lauren Scott, runs the tightest ship of anyone I’ve ever worked with. Her organizational skills are unmatched, as is her ability to handle a crisis (demonstrated when one of our leads fell ill shortly before the Sunday matinee). Her assistant stage managers, Emma Smith, Franz Schauer, and Caitlin Kalsbeek, were an indispensable help to this project. I must also thank our faculty designers Elaine Williams, Mark Hutchinson, and Heath Hansum for their magnificent work; they elevated the quality of this production enormously. Additionally, I would like to thank our costume designer, Rosalind Elise Parenzan, audio technicians Drew Hopkins and Allen Taylor, makeup artists Amber McDonnell and Delaney Clark, and movement director Genna Hartnett. A special thank you as well goes out to Professor Bill Flack in the Department of Psychology, who came in to speak to my cast about the mental illnesses Diana fights in *Next to Normal*.

Finally, thank you to my incredible cast: Mukta Phatak, Midge Zuk, Nick Talbot, Brendan Trybus, Kyle Cohick, and Patrick Newhart. Thank you for trusting me, for showing up every day eager to work, and for loving and supporting each other. You made my job so much easier with your passion for this special show. I cannot thank you enough.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre.....	1
Approach to Music Direction as a Thesis.....	2
Dramaturgical Research.....	5
Score Analysis.....	12
Music.....	12
Lyrics.....	43
Outside References.....	46
Music Directing <i>Next to Normal</i> : The Process and Production, at Bucknell University.....	50
Working With Actors.....	51
Tech Week.....	66
Performances.....	69
Reflections.....	73
Bibliography.....	75
Supplementary Materials: Production Photos.....	78
Appendices.....	81
1. Initial 319 production proposal	
2. Audition and callback journal	
3. Cast list	
4. Example of fall semester design meeting notes	
5. Song breakdown by character	
6. Example of production meeting minutes	

7. Example of rehearsal report
8. Rehearsal journal
9. Production poster
10. Music director's program notes
11. Bucknellian interview on *Next to Normal*
12. Post-production actor surveys

Abstract

As a junior at Bucknell University, I was granted permission by the Department of Theatre and Dance to music direct Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey's *Next to Normal* during the winter of my senior year as a THEA 319 Independent Study. This is a course I applied for in my junior year, but began preparing for as a first year student after deciding I wished to pursue a 319 in music direction. I spent the next year researching musicals to find one that would be both manageable for our department in terms of cast size, style and budget, and relevant for the Bucknell community.

My passion for music direction stemmed from an interest in the ways in which a composer uses the music of a show to enhance character and further the plot, just as a book writer uses dialogue and stage directions. Musicals consist of four overarching elements: music, movement, acting, and design. Productions are most powerful when these elements are fully integrated and working towards the same vision. However, the music of a show is not often considered when discussing acting and directing intention; the music director teaches the notes, while the stage director coaches the acting. As a music director, I was drawn to how I could help actors use songs and orchestration to create stronger, more nuanced moments on stage.

I was first drawn to *Next to Normal* by its electric, pop-rock score. A sung-through show, most of the action and exposition is contained within the music; even when a character is not singing, their lines are usually accompanied by underscoring. It seemed like the perfect show with which to explore my specific interests in music direction. Furthermore, its small cast of six people and relatively low-budget needs in terms of design meant it would be manageable for our

department. Additionally, I was struck by the production's exploration of mental illness within a suburban family; it held a message relevant to Bucknell's campus climate.¹

During the fall of my senior year, I received permission to further pursue this project as an honors thesis as well. Writing a thesis in conjunction with music directing a production of *Next to Normal* allowed me to delve further into researching the history of the production and of musical theatre in general, and to more deeply analyze the score. I was able to explore the analytical side of the production, as well as the artistic.

Throughout the fall semester, stage director Dustyn Martincich and I held design meetings with the faculty and students working on all technical aspects of the production, to ensure a cohesive vision for the production. Dustyn and I held open auditions for all interested Bucknell students early fall semester in order to cast our ensemble. Then, over a seven-week rehearsal period that included fall semester music rehearsals and four hours a day of spring semester rehearsals six days a week, Dustyn, stage manager Lauren Scott and her assistants, movement director Genna Hartnett, our cast, and I worked to build character, learn music and blocking, and form genuine, honest connections onstage. In the week leading up to performances, we added design and technical elements, such as lights, costumes, and sound, before opening for a successful weekend of performances, despite the fact that I was required to step in for one of our leads when he became too ill to perform in our Sunday and Monday shows.

My ultimate goal in working with my actors was to use the music to help them enhance and deepen their characters and relationships in the show. In addition to this, I also worked with them on vocal technique and on achieving the contemporary style of singing necessary for a rock musical such as *Next to Normal*.

¹ See Appendix 1 for full 319 proposal.

Overall, this project has heavily influenced how I approach my work as a music director, and has given me various tools to use when working with actors going forward. In speaking with audience members after the show, I also found many of them were interested in starting dialogues on mental illness after experiencing our production. It was incredibly satisfying to know that I had accomplished at least the beginnings of what I set out to achieve. I am curious to see if these discussions will continue after this project is complete.

The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre

Approach to Music Direction as a Thesis

The fascinating thing about music direction is that there are no strict guidelines to follow. There is no “right” way to music direct, no single path to follow. In conversations with several music directors in the industry, I found that each came from a different background of training and education and that each possessed a different style and approach toward music direction. For example, the primary concern of one director was technique and ensuring that the actors could perfectly execute every melody and harmony written on the page. Another director preferred to take liberties with the score; if an actor sang an alternate melody or riff that he enjoyed, he would keep it as part of the final production. In the industry, music directors are hired precisely because of the unique flavor they will bring to a show and how well their style meshes with the vision a director and producer have for the production.

Regardless of the style or approach, however, all music directors are responsible for helping their actors use the musical score to enhance their performances. In musical theatre, there are four overarching elements of the production: music, movement, acting, and design. When these elements are working together cohesively, the result is an integrated, powerful audience experience. If a production fails, often the reason is a lack of communication between two or more of these elements. Over the years, I have found that there is a strange disconnect for actors in musical theatre between song and scene. They closely analyze all lines of dialogue and stage direction, but as soon as a song begins, they drop character completely and proceed merely to sing the lyrics. Or, having been told to “act the song,” they interpret that as needing to fight against the music and rhyme scheme, and speak as much of the song as dialogue as possible, which defeats the purpose of having a song there in the first place. They see the music as something that hinders their acting, instead of a tool that can aid them.

Taking my previous experiences and developing research into account, I wanted to focus my role as a music director on integrating the music with the other tiers of a musical production.² My approach consisted of three main principles. First, all musical choices, both those made by the composer and those made by the actor, must be justified by acting intention. Second, the songs and underscoring of a show should enhance the director's interpretation of the show. Third, strong vocal technique and style are crucial in order to maintain the health of the actors throughout the course of the show.

Music directing *Next to Normal* as an honors thesis consisted of research and practice both artistic and analytical. I began by conducting dramaturgical research on the history of the show and of musical theatre itself to better understand *Next to Normal*'s context in the musical theatre cannon. I heavily researched the composer and lyricist, Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, respectively, using the knowledge gleaned from this to help guide my analysis of the musical score. Throughout the fall and spring semester, I attended weekly design and production meetings with department faculty to ensure that each production element was working towards the same unified vision for our show. Additionally, stage director Dustyn Martincich and I met frequently outside of rehearsal to discuss our interpretation of the show and maintain cohesiveness between the music and stage direction. After teaching my actors the music during the fall semester, we began our rehearsal process in earnest following winter break. We rehearsed four hours a night, six days a week, incorporating design elements in the week leading up to performances. During this time, I also helped coordinate the actors' microphones and the prerecorded musical tracks with our audio-technicians.

² This differs from the role, for example, of a choral music director, who deals primarily with the element of music, and does not have to contend with elements of character, movement, and design when working with singers.

Normally, the job of a music director would include hiring and conducting a live pit orchestra during performances. However, due to the constraints of the 319 in terms of space and budget, I made the decision to use a pre-recorded musical accompaniment. A live orchestra could easily overwhelm an audience acoustically in a small black box, and purchasing pre-recorded tracks would be significantly more manageable than hiring and training several musicians. We used the tracks for the duration of the rehearsal process, which eliminated the uncertainty a live orchestra added a week before opening can bring to a show. With the recorded tracks, however, we lost a certain magic that comes from the interaction between actor and musician, as the musician responds to subtle differences in an actor's performance from night to night, and creates greater nuance than a pre-recorded track will allow. A track also cannot cover for a missed cue, should an actor enter late or drop a lyric. Overall, however, I did not find that the tracks detracted in any noticeable way from our production.

Dramaturgical Research

Before stepping into my first rehearsal, I found it crucial to conduct dramaturgical research on the composers of *Next to Normal*, Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, and their process. Only through this research, in which I delved into the duo's writing process, examined the scope of their work both separately and as individuals, and explored the work of composers who had influenced them, could I enter rehearsals with a firm grasp of music's role in *Next to Normal* and make educated choices about my music direction style.

Kitt and Yorkey first collaborated while studying at Columbia University, writing and composing the music for the university's centennial Varsity Show, which is also how another famous duo, Rodgers and Hart, first met as well, decades earlier. Author Josh Getlin notes in the Columbia Magazine article, "The Ballad of Kitt and Yorkey," "Their working style was fluid and flexible. Sometimes the lyrics came first, dictating a musical moment; sometimes music defined a scene, and Yorkey wrote words to match it. On occasion both men sat down at a piano together and wrote songs spontaneously" (Getlin 3).

Understanding this style of collaboration was key when I approached the musical score of *Next to Normal*. One of the first things I noticed about the score was a lack of unified style among the many songs of the show. *Next to Normal* is considered a contemporary rock musical; Brian Yorkey explains the decision to pursue this style in a *Stage Directions* interview with Bryan Reesman, stating, "The show deals in extremes of emotion, especially extremes of sadness and anger and frustration, and I think that no kind of music expresses anger and frustration and being at the end of your rope the way rock music does" (Reesman 15). This decision has a twofold effect on the show: firstly, it allows the characters to express themselves in a style of music that they would realistically be exposed to in their everyday lives, on the radio and as part

of their culture. Secondly, it gives the audience a heightened connection to the show. Whereas musicals done in a traditional style, or with a highly stylized or pastiche form, can distance an audience from a show, *Next to Normal* pulls its viewers in with music relevant to their existence. In his foreword in the published copy of *Next to Normal*'s libretto, Anthony Rapp³ describes his first experience with *Rent*, saying, "It was that rare thing in musical theatre: a show that spoke directly to me about the world I lived in. It utilized music that sounded more like the modern rock I listened to than anything from traditional musical theatre, and featured characters that reflected the lives of myself and my friends" (Rapp 12). He notes that *Next to Normal* has a similar effect on its actors and viewers.

However, despite its label as a rock musical, *Next to Normal* often ventures far from the territory of modern rock music; in one scene, the characters sing and dance to a jazz waltz, while later on they perform a doo-wop number. Overall, its score is far less cohesive than those of its contemporaries.⁴ In the same interview with Reesman, Tom Kitt explained his inclusion of various musical styles in the score, saying,

"For me, the story always drove the music...For the pharmacologist number,⁵ for example, I remember the day we hit on the jazz waltz. I wanted to desensitize the drugs, almost make it feel like it's in radio jingle land because I think there is a sense, especially on television...that they do try to desensitize a little bit what they're selling. So musically it seemed to me that that wistful, spring-in-your-step

³ Anthony Rapp originated the role of Mark in *Rent* on Broadway. *Rent* has been marked as a defining influence on contemporary musical theatre. Similarly to *Next to Normal*, it tackled subjects previously considered taboo for musicals, such as the AIDS epidemic, and is often compared to *Next to Normal* as its predecessor.

⁴ This is in comparison to musicals such as *Rock of Ages*, which follow a very defined style of music.

⁵ Here, Kitt refers to "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I," a number in which Diana visits her psychopharmacologist over a period of a few months as he prescribes her different drug regimens to regulate her bipolar disorder.

type music worked well for that, as opposed to saying, ‘This needs to be jazzier.’”
(Reesman 14).

Kitt’s interview informed me that the music composition in *Next to Normal* is just as crucial to understanding the characters and story as the dialogue, lyrics, and stage directions. Every melodic line, orchestral motif, and time signature was written to aid the story in some way. I used this knowledge moving forward in rehearsals with my actors to help them build character or interpret a song; often, when they were unsure of their character’s intention in a line, I was able to point to something in the music as a guide.⁶

While researching the scope of Kitt and Yorkey’s work to determine *Next to Normal*’s relationship to it, I discovered that Kitt has significant experience as an orchestrator,⁷ having orchestrated the music for several shows, including *High Fidelity*, *Laugh Whore*, and *American Idiot* (IBDB). His knowledge of an orchestrator’s job signifies that when composing *Next to Normal*, Kitt would have taken care to specify which instruments he envisioned for each song, and the overall tone and timbre of the music; again, every orchestration was written with the intent of aiding the story and the characters.

Additionally, I also found it essential to research the composers who had influenced Kitt and Yorkey. Kitt, for example, notes in his article, “Following Sondheim,” that he always studies classic musical theatre scores before beginning to write a show, as they inspire him to stray from

⁶ See “Score Analysis,” page 13.

⁷ For a musical, a composer writes the music as a series of melodies, harmonies, and chords, usually as a piano-vocal score. It is the job of the orchestrator to take the score and write out parts for each instrument in an orchestra; this gives them a good deal of control over the final sound of a song. Often, they add extra pieces to the music as well.

his usual writing patterns (Kitt 25). Kitt is a huge admirer of Stephen Sondheim,⁸ both for his style of composing and for his approach to musical theatre. In terms of subject matter, *Next to Normal* took a risk in bringing mental illness to musical theatre. Kitt acknowledges, “I’m sure there were those who, early on, questioned whether *Next to Normal* could be told in the musical theatre. But...we [Kitt and Yorkey] were certain that a musical was the best way to do justice to it, for only the songs could adequately encompass the human and emotional dimensions of mental illness. Sondheim’s gritty relentlessness at getting to the heart of deeply personal human stories showed us the way” (Kitt 22). Sondheim paved the way for musicals like *Next to Normal* with shows that often contained subject matter unusual for the stage at the time, such as *Sweeney Todd*.⁹

Furthermore, Sondheim shaped Kitt’s approach to writing musical motifs as well.¹⁰ Kitt noticed Sondheim’s frequent use of motifs in his writing, and how the composer would use them in musicals such as *Into the Woods* to “give the audience a powerful hook to grab onto every time they make an appearance” (Kitt 23).¹¹ As I conducted my music analysis of *Next to Normal*, I found numerous motifs used throughout the show for a similar purposes.¹²

Sondheim also influenced Kitt’s orchestrations. Often, a composer will write a melody and some basic chord progressions and motifs when creating a song, leaving it to the orchestrator to fill in various instrumental lines and determine the “color,” or timbre, of a piece. Sondheim, however, advocated for writing “intricate, multilayered piano parts with melodic lines that the

⁸ Stephen Sondheim is a renowned Broadway composer known for musicals such as *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Company*, among many more.

⁹ *Sweeney Todd* follows the story of “The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” an exiled London barber bent on revenge, who, upon return, proceeds to murder his customers and bake them into pies with the help of his shop assistant.

¹⁰ A motif is a “short thematic kernel. Usually it consists of a few notes in a particular rhythm” (Cohen and Rosenhaus 121).

¹¹ In *Into the Woods*, the bars of music that precede the title song become a motif, reappearing thematically in different moments of the show. Sondheim uses the motif at the top of the show, and again at the close of the show, to ironically highlight the great changes that the characters have undergone over the course of the musical.

¹² See *The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre* for examples.

orchestrator will use in the orchestration” (Kitt 23). This ensures that the composer has control over the instrumental interpretation of the piece. Kitt used this strategy when composing *Next to Normal*, which informed me that every aspect of the orchestration was intentionally crafted to aid the actor and audience’s interpretation of the production.¹³ This works in conjunction with Kitt’s use of a form-follows-content approach to composing as well; Sondheim was known to borrow from other styles of music to achieve a particular effect in certain songs.¹⁴ Kitt elaborates on the influence of classic musical theatre and his incorporation of a myriad of styles into his score in a “Sound Off” interview with Broadway World’s Paul Cerasaro, explaining:

“For me to try and make "I Dreamed A Dance" or "There's A World" or "How Could I Ever Forget" into rock songs - those songs come as much out of the classical musical theatre canon, like Sondheim and William Finn and Adam Guettel and on and on and on - those songs are just trying to exist in the exact right dramatic way. It wouldn't be right to shoehorn a rock song in - I would just want to do the moment justice. I think that's why Stephen Sondheim is who he is: he taught us all how to do these things the right way” (Cerasaro 3).

By eschewing a unified form for *Next to Normal*, Kitt is actually serving the story more honestly by delivering the music required for each song to deepen the characters and further the plot, instead of worrying about whether a particular song “fits” the style of the show.

¹³ It is important to note that Kitt enlisted Michael Starobin, known for orchestrating several Sondheim shows, including *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Assassins*, to help him orchestrate *Next to Normal*. Starobin, accustomed to working with Sondheim’s complex compositions, would have honored Kitt’s intentions when orchestrating his score.

¹⁴ In an interview with Tom Kitt, Paul Cerasaro notes that Sondheim utilizes a rap style, for example, for “The Witch’s Rap” in *Into the Woods* because he found it to be the most appropriate form to illustrate the witch’s character and story in that moment (Cerasaro 3).

In my research, I also looked at the workshop process for *Next to Normal*, and songs that were cut along the way before it officially opened on Broadway. In 1998, *Next to Normal* was a short musical about electroconvulsive therapy that Kitt and Yorkey had written for the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop titled *Feeling Electric* (Michels 1). Its focus was the relationship between Diana and her doctor. At that point, the only songs Kitt and Yorkey had written for it that would remain intact in the final production were “I Dreamed A Dance” and “Aftershocks” (Geva Journal). After they received a grant from the Jonathan Larson fund to continue to develop their show, the team eventually staged a production in 2008 at New York’s Second Stage. At this point, Kitt and Yorkey changed their direction for the musical, which up until that point had been a snarky, sardonic look at therapy and mental illness. They cut a comical number in which Diana suffers a breakdown in a Costco, and cut the former title number, “Feeling Electric,” as well. In a *New York Times* interview, *Next to Normal*’s producer, David Stone, explained the decision: “‘It was hard for them to lose it,’ Mr. Stone said of Mr. Yorkey and Mr. Kitt. ‘Feeling Electric’ was not only the title song, but also the founding idea. But that show no longer existed. The creators said about 40 songs were cut during the writing” (Cohen 2).

While the doctor, who sang “Feeling Electric,” had originally had a much larger role in the show, the production had come to center around the Goodmans and their relationships, instead of on the medical specifics of Diana’s therapy, which meant that the song had to go. However, I noticed when listening to a filmed clip of “Feeling Electric” that the lyrics of the song’s refrain, “Plug me in and turn me on/Flip the switch, I’m good as gone” appear in a different form in *Next to Normal*, in Diana and Natalie’s “Wish I Were Here.”

After these significant changes were made, the show had a run in its new form at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. The show had lost a lot of its irony, and was now packing a huge emotional punch. As Yorkey noted in “The Ballad of Kitt and Yorkey,” “There’s a big difference between being 27 and 37. When we were in our 20s, irony was a big thing. Being snarky comes easily when you’re that age and think you’re smarter than everyone else. It’s much more of a risk to open up your heart to something that’s painful” (Getlin 4). Having finally found success, *Next to Normal* opened on Broadway on April 15, 2009 at the Booth Theatre, and went on to win a Tony Award for Best Score and the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama as the eighth musical to ever receive that particular honor. Kitt also received the 2009 Frederick Loewe Award for Dramatic Composition from the Dramatists Guild of America.

Score Analysis

Music

In a musical, characters sing when dialogue alone is no longer enough to express an emotion or objective. Music has the power to elevate tension through song or underscoring, convey subtext, or even contradict a character's words. While the story of *Next to Normal* might not be considered "typical" content for a musical, Kitt and Yorkey found that no form but a musical would do it justice. In an interview with PBS Newshour's "Art Beat," Tom Kitt told Murrey Jacobson,

"I think that this is a subject matter that affects most people. We have very heightened emotions about mental illness. Music in theater is meant to convey those heightened emotions. The saying goes that you sing about something in a musical when emotion becomes so great that you have to. So I felt that a story like this, filled with many heightened emotions, was a natural fit to sing and the only thing was to make sure that I wrote appropriate music for each dramatic moment in the show and not try to overthink it but just go naturally where I feel like Brian's writing is taking the music" (Michels 2).

This knowledge, along with the dramaturgical research I conducted before cast rehearsals began, steered my music direction of the show. As I discuss in "Working With Actors," some music directors prefer to focus solely on the craft of singing when working with a cast.¹⁵ They prefer to work on vocal technique and ensuring every harmony and rhythm is in place while leaving

¹⁵ See "Working With Actors," page 52.

acting interpretation up to the stage director. However, as a music director I have always been invested in how the music of a show affects the interpretation of action. For me, working on acting the song is an integral part of music direction; if we allow the music and underscoring to assist us, we can hugely enhance the action and emotion of a show.

Often, when performers are told to “act the song,” they interpret that to mean fighting the music by speaking lyrics without pitch, and changing the rhythm and melody of songs as they please. They fail to realize that more often than not, the composer has built clues for action into the score. As John Franceschina writes in his book, *Music Theory Through Musical Theatre*:

"The value and liveliness of words is emphasized in acting and musical theatre performance classes, but, too often, in emphasizing the lyrics of a song, the music is disregarded, or treated merely as a subordinate or servant of the words without a life of its own. Students are told to "forget about the music" and to "speak the lyrics" without regard for how or why a particular musical phrase was written, and the result is often a confrontation between dramatic intent and musical necessity -- a conflict that could easily have been avoided had the student and teacher explored the dramatic intent inherent in the actual composition of the song" (Franceschina 2).

Leaning into the music instead opens up a world of acting choices and interpretation, which is something I emphasized as music director of *Next to Normal*.

Next to Normal is unique from many musicals in that it is almost completely sung-through; most of the plot is furthered through song, and the little dialogue that does occur mostly

happens within songs or with underscoring. In this way, its form is closely related to opera, where song and scene blend seamlessly into action. This differs from more classic musical theatre shows, such as *Oklahoma*, for example, where the music is interspersed throughout the show, and does not necessarily further the plot in the same way that a sung-through production would. Since the music is such a prominent element of the show, I found it crucial to examine all facets of the score, including rhythm and melody, song style, meter and tempo, intervals and counterpoint, motifs and chord progression, and underscoring.

Rhythm is one of the most important aspects of music to pay attention to as a music director. As Franceschina writes, “Music is a temporal art, the performance (and perception) of which always occurs during a passage of time” (Franceschina 12). Rhythm is so integral to the music of theatre that most performers are familiar with the old adage, “A wrong note sung at the right time is half right; a right note sung at the wrong time is completely wrong,” by the end of their first performance experience. Rhythm allows composers to play with emotion through song. A staccato¹⁶ rhythm, for example, could indicate a sense of urgency, or excitement, while a legato¹⁷ rhythm could indicate ease or joy. Composers can also play with the rhythm of recurring lines throughout the course of a show to change the meaning behind the line, or indicate a change in action. For example, in Dan’s song, “He’s Not Here,” his line, “He’s not here/He’s not here/Love, I know you know,” is composed of a series of eighth notes followed by quarter notes with fermatas, which gives the impression that Dan is hesitating, struggling to gently approach the situation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Staccato generally means short and sharp. Notes are disconnected from each other. They can be colloquially described as “popcorn-like.”

¹⁷ Legato refers to phrases that are smooth and connected.

¹⁸ “He’s Not Here” is sung by Dan after Diana brings out a birthday cake to celebrate what would have been their son Gabe’s birthday. This is the first time the audience realizes that Gabe, whom they have seen throughout the show, is actually a hallucination, and that the Goodmans’ son died as a baby.

4 DAN: He's not here... he's not here. Love, I know you know.

5 6

Vibes *mp*

Vcl.

Later in the show, Dan sings the same line against in “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.”¹⁹ This time, however, Kitt changes his rhythm to a series of dotted eighth notes.

43 Vamp Until...Until... DR. MADDEN: Until?

44 DAN: He's not here...

45 DAN: He's not here...

w/Gtr. sim. 3x

pp A^bsus A^b5 A^bsus A^b5 A^b5

L.H. PLAY

w/Bs.

+Vln. *mp* +Vcl. *cresc. poco a poco*

126

Piano/Conductor 5. MAKE UP YOUR MIND / CATCH ME I'M FALLING Next to Normal

46 He's not here... Love I know, you know.

47

48 NATALIE: *f* you know.

HENRY: *f* you know.

¹⁹ In “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling,” Diana undergoes hypnosis to treat her depression and bipolar disorder. During the song, Diana wanders through her memories, reliving moments of tension with her family, including Dan.

The syncopation makes Dan's words more emphatic than the straight eighth notes of the earlier iteration, representing his growing frustration with Diana's inability to let go of her grief for her son.

Changes in meter are significant as well, as they give a director clues as to the action of a scene; often, such a shift is prompted by an external force in the scene acting upon the character, as opposed to the meter change being arbitrary. For example, "How Could I Ever Forget" is written in a six-eight meter.²⁰

The image displays a musical score for a scene. It begins with a key signature change to three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a tempo marking of 'Poco rubato'. The score is divided into two parts: DIANA and DAN. DIANA's part starts at measure 9 with the lyrics 'We were still liv-ing down - town...'. DAN's part begins at measure 10 with the lyrics 'My black coat thrown o - ver my blue night - gown..You'. The score includes vocal lines for both characters and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a prominent bass line with eighth notes and chords. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines, and measure numbers 9, 10, 11, and 12 are indicated above the staff.

For the most part, the piece follows this melodic progression. However, in measure seventeen, where the rhythm should duplicate that of measure ten, the meter abruptly changes to three-eight for one measure, eliminating most of the rest time in that measure.

²⁰ In "How Could I Ever Forget," Dan and Diana discuss for the first time onstage the circumstances of their son's death. Dan resists Diana at first as she insists they remember, but eventually gives into the memories.

16 More movement ♩ = 144 17 18 19

How could I ev-er for - get? Out - side the morn - ing was cool and wet. He

Gtr.

mp G \flat G \flat sus2 G \flat D \flat /F

Kitt wrote the meter in this way so that the actor playing Diana quickly leaps into the next line, and provides a crucial clue to the action of the scene in doing so. Since Kitt has had such significant experience with composition and orchestration, such a meter change could not be arbitrary; it indicates that something has occurred externally in the scene. In our production, I interpreted the change as Dan attempting to interrupt Diana, which makes it necessary for her to jump in and continue the line more quickly than anticipated.

Another example of changing meter occurs in “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,”²¹ which alternates continuously from six-eight to a rarer asymmetric five-eight pattern.²² Since symmetric meters are more intuitive to the ear, a listener would naturally anticipate the six-eight pattern. The earlier arrival of the downbeat in five-eight therefore creates the sensation of tumbling forward, that Natalie is tripping over her words and losing control during the song.

²¹ In this Act I number, Natalie frustratedly vents to Henry about how she lives in the shadow of her late brother, even though he died before she was born.

²² An asymmetric, or irregular, pattern means that the beats of the measure cannot be divided evenly into a conducting pattern. A majority of meters used in musical theatre songs are regular, including six-eight time, which means that six counts of eighth notes are contained in a measure of music. When conducting six-eight, a conductor can evenly divide beats into two sweeping counts of three. In five-eight, on the other hand, the beats would have to be divided into either a two-count pattern of “one-two-three, one-two,” or “one-two, one two three.” Either way, the counts would be asymmetrical, hence the name of the meter.

19 20 21 22

Su-per-boy and the in-vis-i-ble girl... eve-ry-thing a kid ought-a be.

Vln, Vcl *8mb*

(Gtr. cont. *sim*)

f D⁵ C⁵/D D⁵ A⁵/D

w/Bs.

Drs: Cym's col Gtr.

The musical score is for a song in D major, 6/8 time. It features a vocal line, violin and viola (8mb), guitar (continuing from the previous page, *sim*), and piano (w/Bs.). The piano part includes chords D⁵, C⁵/D, D⁵, and A⁵/D. The lyrics are: 'Su-per-boy and the in-vis-i-ble girl... eve-ry-thing a kid ought-a be.'

This song marks a stark contrast to Natalie’s earlier solo, “Everybody Else,” which follows a steady four-four rhythm, and represents a dynamic change for Natalie’s character. In “Everybody Else,” she is a straight-laced over-achiever who outlines her meticulous plan for her future and career, and prides herself on her tight control of her life. By the end of “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,” on the other hand, Natalie tries marijuana for the first time, the beginning of her spiral into prescription pill abuse and loss of control over her life. The meter change mirrors this to an extent.

Style of music also plays a significant role in song interpretation, especially for the music of *Next to Normal*, in which song form is so heavily influenced by content. Historically, certain styles of music have been used to signify different emotional states. Waltzes, for example, are traditionally employed to show romance and feelings of love or joy. Kitt, however, uses these historical implications ironically by writing “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I” as a waltz. In this song, Diana describes her relationship with her psychopharmacologist as “an odd romance,” since, as she says, “He knows my deepest secrets/I know his name.” Kitt shows here how one-sided the relationship of doctor and patient is – how Diana is obliged to reveal her most

private thoughts and memories to Doctor Fine, while he reveals nothing but his name and title to her.

The choice of a jazz waltz, specifically, to illustrate the process of medicating a mental illness stretches even further than a riff on romance, however. As noted in my dramaturgical research,²³ Kitt settled on this song form because, “I wanted to desensitize the drugs, almost make it feel like it’s in radio jingle land because I think there is a sense, especially on television...that they do try to desensitize a little bit what they’re selling” (Reesman 14). He crafted a catchy tune that audiences could conceivably exit the theatre humming to deliver a frightening message about the way in which drug industries and modern science can quickly desensitize us to medication. As background voices cheerfully hum doo-wops, Diana lists her reactions to each round of drugs she is given, which include headaches, nausea, blurred vision, loss of appetite, insomnia, and worse. They pleasantly list various side effects of Diana’s medications, which include, “Diarrhea, constipation, nervous laughter, palpitations...” And of course, as the voices gleefully note, “Use may be fatal.” The music purposely detracts from the gravity of their message.

Furthermore, one of the key tenets of jazz as a style is the use of improvisation where performers take turns riffing on a melody, inventing new melodies spontaneously. Interspersed in “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I” are scenes with Natalie and Henry playing the piano together, as Henry teaches Natalie to play jazz music, instead of the rigid classical style she favors. The orchestra pianist is specifically instructed to improvise during this section to underscore the spontaneity of the jazz style:

²³ See Pre-Production Dramaturgical Research, p. 3



At one point, Natalie asks, “It’s just that the thing with jazz is, how do you ever know if you got it right? It’s just making this shit up.” This mirrors Diana’s conversation with Doctor Fine, as he makes yet another adjustment to her medication, saying, “So we’ll try again, and eventually we’ll get it right.” In return, Diana sarcastically notes, “Not a very exact science, is it?” Kitt purposely draws a parallel between the art of jazz improvisation and the science of a psychopharmacologist trying to successfully medicate a patient, without knowing how the individual will react to any given drug. It is not a question of getting it right, but rather of striking out in the dark and hopefully hitting on something successful.

Another musical style is referenced in Diana’s “I Miss The Mountains.” This powerhouse song is written as a folk ballad, a style associated with nature and the wilderness. This aligns closely with the imagery Kitt and Yorkey use to describe Diana’s experience of her bipolar disorder, as she sings, “I miss the mountains/I miss the lonely climb/Wandering through the wilderness/And spending all my time/Where the air is clear/And cuts you like a knife.” Kitt’s use of the folk ballad style enhances Yorkey’s lyrics without distracting the audience: the ballad’s easygoing four-four time signature still allows Diana’s voice to carry the piece.

Immediately after “I Miss The Mountains” comes “It’s Gonna Be Good,” a wild departure from *Next to Normal*’s pop-rock style.²⁴ It is written with elements of a fox-trot, a style more commonly associated with classic musical theatre from before the 1970s. Although “It’s Gonna Be Good” employs cut time, it is typically written in four-four time with an alternating bass line that accentuates the first and third beats of a measure, as shown below.

10 11 12 13

It's gon-na be good. Two weeks and it's all work-ing just the

Mm - hmm

Stgs.

mp

E D B E C#m

Its appearance in a contemporary rock musical is both jarring and significant. In *Writing Musical Theater*, Allen Cohen and Steven Rosenhaus explain, "Accompaniments...reflect the times in which they were written...Since the 1970s, fox-trot accompaniments have been increasingly rare. Unless they are used deliberately for comedic or pastiche effect, they sound tired and dated" (Cohen and Rosenhaus 130-131).

²⁴ Dan sings “It’s Gonna Be Good” right after Kitt and Yorkey reveal to the audience that Diana has stopped taking her medication.

This is precisely the case with “It’s Gonna Be Good.” With orchestral instructions that order the musicians to play in a way that is, “Disgustingly happy and perky” (measure 8), the song is meant to sound comically out of place. Dan sings about how well his family life is going as the other characters of the show act as his background singers to a tune that would not be out of place in a 1950s family sitcom.. It is meant to poke fun at the ideal of the “perfect” family, and Dan’s desperation to achieve such normalcy. Dan cheerfully applauds the effects of her medication, saying how, “It’s almost been a month and she’s as happy as a clam,” when in reality Diana is merely going through one of her bipolar manic periods. At one point during this number she lists all of the tasks she has completed for the day, saying, “I disinfected the entire house, rewired the computer, and did some decoupage...Next, I think I’ll retile the roof!” This is a common symptom of mania – extreme bursts of energy and hyper-productivity. The upbeat, peppy music reflects this; in a way, Dan and the other characters are a manifestation of Diana’s mania.

The ending of “It’s Gonna Be Good” finds all of the characters repeating the phrase, “It’s gonna be good” in rapid succession:

The musical score shows the final measures of the song, starting at measure 115. The tempo and dynamics markings include *cresc. poco a poco*, *poco accel.*, *p sub.*, *cresc. e accel. poco a poco*, and *tutti rhy.*. The lyrics for the characters are as follows:

- DIANA:** gon-na be good gon-na be good gon-na be gon-na be gon-na be gon-na be
- NATALIE:** Good!
- GABE/HENRY:** gon-na be good gon-na be good gon-na be gon-na be gon-na be gon-na be
- Bibus/C:** gon-na be good gon-na be good gon-na be gon-na be gon-na be gon-na be

The score is written for a vocal ensemble and piano, with the piano part providing a rhythmic accompaniment.

The song sounds as though it is escaping the grasp of the characters, getting wilder and more over-the-top as it progresses. In this way, Kitt accurately represents mania as a loss of control: Diana cannot control her periods of wild joy and abandon any more than she can control her periods of grief and depression.

Diana sings “I Dreamed A Dance” as she holds the music box that once belonged to Gabe. Therefore, the song is written as a music box-style waltz, delicate and slow. The romantic nature of the style, coupled with poetic lyrics such as, “We spun around a thousand stars/I dreamed a dance with you,” in which Diana fantasizes about sharing a dance with her son, lulls the audience briefly into a state of calm, much needed after the driving “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” that preceded it. However, while on the surface the piece is romantic, Kitt and Yorkey actually use the style to explore a dark symptom of depression. This song is immediately followed by “There’s A World,” which ends with Diana attempting suicide. Diana sings, “I know the night is dying dear...I know the day will dawn,” dreading the moment when she will have to rise again from the romance of her dreams to face yet another day. The desire to sleep, the inability to rise in the morning because the ache of reality is too great, is a common symptom of depression. The tune of “I Dreamed A Dance” is intentionally romantic, as it is meant to illustrate Diana’s headspace at the time, and explore viscerally why the prospect of suicide might appeal to her in that moment. This approach sets *Next to Normal* apart from other pieces of theatre that deal with suicide in that it does not simply condemn the act and move on; instead, it acknowledges why Diana might choose this path. Furthermore, it illustrates that recovery from mental illness is not a simple path; it is an uphill climb, with mountains and valleys, relapses and progress made. Indeed, in the next scene, Doctor Madden explains to a

distraught Dan, who believed her treatments were working, that, “Sometimes patients recover just enough strength to follow through on suicidal impulses, but not enough strength to resist them.”

I also looked at Kitt’s use of intervals in the music composition of *Next to Normal*.²⁵ For example, he employs the “perfect prime” in several cases throughout the score. A perfect prime simply means that the same note is repeated numerous times in a row in a line (hence the reason the interval is referred to as “prime” – there is no pitch distance between the two notes). The perfect prime can be used to emphasize repetition in a phrase and draw attention to specific lyric lines that the composer wishes to stand out. For example, in “You Don’t Know,” Diana argues with Dan as she describes what it is like to live with bipolar disorder. Her lyrics are written in a series of perfect primes: when she demands, “Do you wake up in the morning and need help to lift your head? Do you read obituaries and feel jealous of the dead?” the pitches follow a series of C, then B, then A notes. This format is repeated throughout the rest of the verses.

²⁵ Intervals refer to the distance between two music notes. They are named by counting the number of pitches between the two on the diatonic scale. Intervals can be consonant, meaning they sound pleasant and are considered “stable” (not needing resolution), or dissonant, meaning they sound unpleasant and are considered “unstable,” and usually in need of resolution. The quality of interval is also useful in naming and describing them: Perfect intervals are considered the most consonant because of their sound, hence the name. Major intervals generally sound bright and happy, while minor intervals can sound melancholy or sinister. Augmented intervals are major intervals of the same name raised a half step, while diminished intervals are minor intervals lowered a half step (Franceschina 75-92).

Since the notes do not vary much, the audience instead hones in on Diana's lyrics. The musical effect is that of Diana gritting her teeth, as though she is trapped in a pressure cooker and trying not to lose her temper during the verses.

Kitt also uses the perfect prime frequently in "Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I'm Falling." Gabe first sings, "Catch me I'm falling...catch me I'm falling," on a repeated A flat note.

The musical score is for the song "Catch Me I'm Falling" and consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 57-59) features a vocal line for Gabe, a piano accompaniment, and a string section. The vocal line is marked "Ghostly, sad" and "GABE: p". The lyrics are "Catch me I'm falling... Catch me I'm falling... Fast-er than an - y - one should." The piano accompaniment includes a "Syn: Dreaming Box" and a "Vcl." part. The string section includes a "p" (piano) marking and a "(Bs. out)" (Bass out) marking. The second system (measures 58-59) continues the vocal line and the piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 59-60) continues the vocal line and the piano accompaniment. The score is written in 8/8 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

The repetition of note and lyric here forms an arrest in the music: the audience is drawn back to this lyrical motif, which will resurface multiple times throughout the song and the rest of the show. The following line, "faster than anyone should," is written on a descending line, which illustrates the sentiment of rapidly falling expressed in the lyrics, before returning to the perfect prime again for "catch me I'm falling" in the next measure.

The perfect prime appears in “Aftershocks”²⁶ as well, where a majority of the song is sung on these repeated intervals:

The musical score is for the song "Aftershocks" by David Byrne and Chris Stills. It is in 4/4 time, marked "Allegro, urgent" with a tempo of 124 beats per minute. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Gabe, starting with a rest for two measures, then a quarter note on C# (labeled '3' in a box), followed by a series of eighth notes on C# and D. The lyrics "They've managed to get rid of me— re - turn me to the grave.—" are written below the notes. The second system shows the guitar line (labeled "Stgs." and "mp") playing a continuous eighth-note pattern on C# and D. The third system shows the piano accompaniment (labeled "mp") with the right hand playing a continuous eighth-note pattern on C# and D, and the left hand playing a simple bass line with quarter notes on C# and D. The guitar part is labeled "+Gtr. o's" and also plays a simple bass line.

As shown above, Gabe’s lyrics are written on a repeated C sharp, occasionally moving to a D, only to quickly return to the C sharp. In this case, the perfect prime actually highlights the few sections of music where the notes do change more dramatically; the tempo slows down as well to exaggerate this change. Kitt does this to emphasize the lyrics there: “They’ve driven out the demons and they’ve earned you this reprieve./The memories are gone./The aftershocks live on./But with nothing to remember,/Is there nothing left to grieve?”

²⁶ “Aftershocks” sees Gabe’s first appearance after Diana undergoes electroconvulsive therapy (E.C.T.) to eradicate his ghost from her memories. In the song, he sings of the merits and hazards of the treatment, and implies that it is not a proper cure for bipolar disorder: “They cut away the cancer/But forgot to fill the hole/Removed me from your memory/I’m still there in your soul.” By the end of the song, the audience is forewarned that Diana will likely relapse.

52 *hang-ing from—your sleeve. They've driv-en out—the de - mons and they've earned you this re-prieve: The*

53 *rit.*

54 *(Stgs. out)*

55 *Colla voce*

56 *mem-o-ries are gone. The af-ter-shocks live on. But with noth-ing to re-mem-ber, is there noth-ing left to*

57 *(Vib. out)*

58 *Solo mp*

(Gtr, Bs. out)

f Dm6/F

p F#m

+Gtr.

mf Bm7

+Bs. 8vb

These lyrics are crucial because they tell a very different story from “Better Than Before,” the song that precedes “Aftershocks,” in which Dan and Diana resolve to improve their family life. “Better Than Before” ends on a hopeful note; Diana seems to be improving medically, even though she is still suffering from memory loss thanks to her E.C.T. treatment, and Dan is relieved that Gabe no longer seems to haunt their family. In these few lines of “Aftershocks,” however, Gabe destroys that hope. He calls her E.C.T. - induced memory loss a “reprieve,” rather than a permanent fix for her problems. He then implies that the loss of her memory is not a

feasible cure after all, as perhaps her mental illness does not require the memory to continue manifesting itself: “With nothing to remember/Is there nothing left to grieve?”

Kitt also uses the perfect prime in a unique way during Dan’s “He’s Not Here.” During the song, the melodic pattern of a falling major third interval followed by a rising major second is repeated throughout the song numerous times:

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is for the vocal part, labeled 'DAN:'. It contains two phrases of music. The first phrase, measures 4-5, has the lyrics 'He's not here... he's not here.' The second phrase, measures 7-8, has the lyrics 'Do you feel he's still real?'. The piano accompaniment is shown in two staves below the vocal line. It features a repeating melodic pattern of a falling major third followed by a rising major second. The score is marked with a 'v' at the end of the first phrase and 'mp' (mezzo-piano) for the piano part in the second phrase.

Kitt, however, changes this pattern on the final line of the song. Although Dan repeats the line, “He’s not here,” instead of the “here” being lifted by a major second, it remains on the perfect prime with “not.” The song ends without the expected resolution, making the phrase sounds less definitive, which implies that Gabe is not, perhaps, actually gone after all.

Another interval Kitt uses for emphasis in his score is the octave, which involves jumping from one note to the same note eight steps away. This consonant leap “produces the musical dramatic effect of reaching out with the comfort and stability of tonal familiarity” (Franceschina 78). It is a way to draw the audience into the character’s desires.²⁷ Kitt writes numerous octaves

²⁷ Claude-Michel Schönberg, for example, uses the perfect octave in *Les Misérables*’ “Bring Him Home.” In this case, Jean Valjean begs God to bring his adopted daughter’s love, Marius, home safely from the barricades. His

into Gabe's "I'm Alive." The song starts in a quiet, almost seductive place, but on the chorus leaps dramatically up the octave and continues at a more driving pace:

The image shows a musical score for measures 25 through 28 of the song "I'm Alive" from the musical *Next to Normal*. The score is written for voice and piano. Measure 25 begins with the vocal line on the treble clef and the piano accompaniment on the grand staff. The vocal line has the lyrics "and blood..." and the piano part has a C chord. Measure 26 continues the vocal line with "But I'm a - live" and the piano part has a C chord. Measure 27 is marked with a box labeled "Bouncy" and a forte (f) dynamic. The vocal line has the lyrics "I'm a-live I am so a-live,—" and the piano part has a G chord. Measure 28 continues the vocal line with "and I etc." and the piano part has a Csus2 chord. The piano part also includes a "Drs: time" marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and chords.

This leap emphasizes the phrase, "But I'm alive," and pinpoints Gabe's overarching desire in the show, which is to be remembered so that his manifestation can live on.

Motifs also play an integral role in music interpretation. A motif, defined by Cohen and Rosenhaus in *Writing Musical Theater* as "a short thematic kernel" (Cohen and Rosenhaus 121), consists of a measure or few measures of notes combined in a certain way. Composers use it for a variety of purposes, as its repetition sets up a musical expectation that can be exploited either by leaning into the expectation or by contradicting it. Motifs can appear at any point in a show, and help establish character, as particular themes are often tied to individual characters.

A recurring motif in *Next to Normal* is set up in the prelude, entitled "Night." The piano line repeats every measure in the same pattern of notes and rhythm for the rest of the prelude.

pleas escalate musically in intervals until the climax of the song, in which Valjean makes his strongest statement on a perfect octave.



The “Night” motif resurfaces again at numerous points in the score. For example, it plays in the underscoring between “Perfect For You” and “I Miss The Mountains,” and again in the underscoring of “Wish I Were Here.” “Night” ties the Goodman family to their past, and the tragedies that lie there. In the prelude, the audience meets Gabe, the ultimate symbol of the family’s various griefs and mental illnesses, for the first time. When it plays before “I Miss The Mountains,” it underscores the moment during which Diana reflects on her decision to marry Dan due to her unplanned pregnancy, and compares it to her inability now to guide Natalie through her own first love with Henry. This moment leads to Diana’s decision to stop taking her medication. In “Wish I Were Here,” it plays as Dan collects Diana from her first E.C.T. treatment, in which a large portion of her long-term memory was eradicated. This moment is a catalyst for the final disintegration of Dan and Diana’s relationship in the show, where Dan’s desire to erase Gabe from their past has finally gone too far.

“Night” appears one last time in *Next to Normal*’s finale, significantly titled “Light,” with one major change:

17 **DAN:** 18 19 20

Night af - ter night we'd sit and wait for the morn - ing light.

mp C7no3 Vcl. C7sus Toms C7no3 C7sus Toms

+Crash +Crash

21 22 23 24

But we've wait - ed far too long for all that's wrong to be made right.

Vcl. (Syn. out) C7no3 F#sus2/A F#sus2 G#sus

+Crash +Cym. roll

It underscores Dan's lyrics as he sings of waiting "night after night" for a beacon of hope in his family's fight for normalcy. However, when he says, "But we've waited far too long/For all that's wrong/To be made right," though the motif rhythm stays the same, the chords change from a mysterious-sounding C7 into a hopeful-sounding F#sus2. This signifies a crucial turning point in Dan's character; at this point, he stops trying to repress the memory of Gabe and instead goes to seek help for his own grief. A similar progression occurs under Diana's verse in "Light," in which she sings, "Day after day/Wishing all our cares away...Some ghosts are never gone/But we go on/We still go on," and during Natalie's final scene with Henry. Therefore, although the show does not end in a neatly packaged bow, as Diana has left Dan to live with her parents and the

audience is left with some uncertainty as to whether the family will truly be able to heal from the events of the show, this motif change in “Light” gives a clue that a change has occurred for the better in their lives. The show therefore ends on a hopeful night, having transitioned from “Night” into “Light.”

Motifs, as briefly touched on above, also play a crucial role in “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.” During this number, Diana undergoes hypnosis to treat her bipolar disorder, and different character themes resurface to represent her reliving these memories. The motifs represent moments in which Diana’s illness has hurt her family: Dan sings “He’s not here,” while Natalie sings her theme from “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,” “She’s not there,” which represents not just Natalie’s feelings of invisibility in her family, but also all of the times Diana could not attend Natalie’s recitals and other important events growing up because of her illness. Diana is forced to confront how bipolar disorder has affected her family.

The underscoring of “Everything Else” also becomes a crucial motif in “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.” During the song, Natalie must give her piano recital to get a scholarship for college by playing this underscoring. However, unlike in the original song, she quickly makes major errors while playing:

95 96 97

Solo

mp

(Natalie makes a big mistake)

G.P.

GO

She follows these mistakes by railing against how “rigid and structured” classical playing is, and how “There’s no room for improvisation.” This musically represents Natalie’s spiral from over-achieving, straight-A perfectionist into the Natalie we meet at the start of Act II, who is out clubbing on quite a few drugs on a Tuesday night.

Whether we realize it or not, Western music has conditioned us to anticipate certain chord progressions over others.²⁸ It has also conditioned us to have certain expectations when we hear chord progressions; some come with emotions attached to them, while others can feel either unresolved or complete. When writing music, composers can either work with these expectations or subvert them, depending on their intention for the piece.

“There’s A World,” for example, is a curious piece in that it feels like it should naturally fall at the close of Act I. At the end of this song, Gabe leads Diana offstage, and we hear from Doctor Madden that she has attempted suicide. The ending chords of the piece have a finality to them, in that they end in a predicted B flat major without variation, and without a transition for a following piece, unlike the majority of the preceding songs, which either move fluidly into the next number, end in an unresolved chord, or are cut off abruptly by dialogue.

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "world where we can be free Come with me." The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, with a "Glock out" instruction. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, with a "mf" dynamic marking and a "Segue to #15 'E.C.T.'" instruction. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

²⁸ A quick perusal of popular music shows how ubiquitous the chord progression “I-V-vi-IV” is, for example. A small selection of famous songs that follow this progression include Green Day’s “21 Guns,” OneRepublic’s “Apologize,” Adele’s “Someone Like You,” Beyoncé’s “If I Were A Boy,” and A-ha’s “Take On Me,” to name a few.

All of this seems to point to an Act I finale number, in which the audience must wait until after intermission to discover Diana's fate. Instead, Kitt and Yorkey move swiftly onto the next scene, which features Dan and Doctor Madden discussing treatment options for Diana going forward. The reason for this is that Kitt and Yorkey are largely unconcerned with leaving the audience in suspense: Diana's suicide attempt is not written to be a cliffhanger, a cheap trick for shock value. Instead, they examine how its effect on the Goodmans, and how it shifts the relationships within the family. In this way, Kitt subverts audience expectations and enhances the story in doing so.

"I've Been" finds Dan near his breaking point after Diana's suicide attempt. Alone in his house, he recounts with frustration how he has tried to help his wife through her illness, how he has pushed aside his own fears and problems in order to be there for her, and how it has still not been enough. The verses largely follow a repetitive chord pattern of F minor seven, to D flat with a sustained second, to A flat, to E flat, with a similar progression in the chorus, standard fare for a contemporary pop-rock song. However, there are two key spots in which the music deviates from this pattern. The first comes immediately after Dan sings, "And whenever she goes flying, I keep my feet right on the ground. Oh, now I need a lift and there's no one around." At this point, violins enter and the music shifts into a soaring, lifted pattern of A flat major to G flat major, while Gabe enters to echo Dan's vocals. This melodically lifted portion of the song represents escapism, Dan's desire to be free from his role as caregiver, but unwillingness to lose his wife. It is important to note that this is the first time Gabe enters a scene with Dan without Diana being present. Gabe, a reflection of each character's internal struggles and mental illnesses, appears at one of Dan's lowest points. This indicates that Diana is not the only one struggling with demons since their son's death.

The second musical shift occurs in the last four measures of the song, where the chord progression shifts to an E flat major with D in the base, followed by a D flat sustained second. This repeats twice at a slow tempo, and piano and violin dominate, while the guitar rhythm that had previously driven the song fades away. This is a stark deviation from what came before, and serves to highlight a shift in lyrics as well: For the entire song, Dan sings about how, “I’ve been...” and everything that he has experienced while helping Diana. However, as the music shifts, Dan sings, “I’ve never been alone. I could never be alone.”

Piano/Conductor

11. I'VE BEEN

Next to Normal

The change in music catches the audience's ear and forces them to tune into Dan's words as he turns from what he has been to what he has never been, which reveals a crucial trait of his character: Dan grasps onto his family and focuses on Diana's problems because he dreads being alone with his own thoughts. If Diana leaves him, he will have to confront his own demons.

Music can also emphasize and underscore a character's words. For example, in "Perfect For You," Henry works to convince Natalie of why she should date him. The opening verse is dark, chromatic, and intense, as Henry describes everything that is wrong with our planet, and how, "The world is at war, filled with death and disease/We dance on the edge of destruction."

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps). It contains measures 13, 14, and 15. The lyrics are: "plan - et is poi - soned, the o - ceans, the air... a - round and be - neath... and a - bove". The melody is chromatic, moving by half-steps. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, also in D major. It features a wavy line in the vocal line above it. The piano part has a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Chord symbols C#m7 and C#m7(6) are written below the piano part.

The muddled nature and chromatic half-steps lend urgency to Henry's message, as he observes the state of the planet. However, as soon as Henry reaches the refrain, in which he sings of how he could be perfect for Natalie, the music resolves to a gentle D major key.

35 **36 Tenderly** 37 38

Per - fect for you... I could be per - fect for you.

Gtr, Bs OUT

p *sub.*

w/Cym's

mp DMaj11

F#m/C# F#m⁶/C# F#m⁷/C#

This musical score for 'Tenderly' spans measures 35 to 38. It features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'Per - fect for you...' and 'I could be per - fect for you.' The guitar and bass parts are indicated as 'Gtr, Bs OUT'. The piano accompaniment includes chords F#m/C#, F#m⁶/C#, and F#m⁷/C# in the left hand, and a melody in the right hand with a 'w/Cym's' (with cymbals) effect. The tempo/mood is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and the chord is 'DMaj11'.

This suggests to the audience that Henry might actually be perfect for Natalie, and that being in a relationship with him might help keep her complicated family problems at bay.

Conversely, music can also contradict a character's words. For example, in "There's A World," Gabe sings, "There's a world I know/A place we can go/Where the pain will go away/There's a world where the sun shines each day." These lyrics sound hopeful, with positive and happy imagery. However, the underscoring tells a different story.

3 SLOW, GHOSTLY, SOMEWHAT REE 4 5 6

(GABE)

world... There's a world I know. A place we can go where the pain will go a-way—

SOLO

7 8 9 10

there's a world where the sun shines each day. There's a

This musical score for 'There's A World' spans measures 3 to 10. It is marked 'SLOW, GHOSTLY, SOMEWHAT REE' and '(GABE)'. The vocal line in treble clef has lyrics: 'world... There's a world I know. A place we can go where the pain will go a-way—' and 'there's a world where the sun shines each day. There's a'. The piano accompaniment includes a 'SOLO' section in the left hand and a melody in the right hand.

The chords here are minor and haunting; the D minor that ends the phrase, “There’s a world where the sun shines each day,” suggests that the world Gabe describes is perhaps not the haven he paints it to be.

Kitt uses a similar technique at the end of “Better Than Before,” when Natalie, Dan, and Diana sing in G major, “Gonna get us back to better than before...make everything much better than before...better than before.” At the very end of the song, the anticipated chord is a G major, which would resolve the chord progression and finish the song cleanly. Instead, the music transitions into F minor, which clashes ominously with the harmony that the three characters hold over it. The effect is unsettling, implying that things will not actually become “better than before,” at least not right away. This implication is confirmed as the song leads directly into “Aftershocks.”

Natalie and Henry’s “Hey #1” and “Hey #2” end in an equally unresolved fashion as well. In the closing line of both numbers, Natalie, whose relationship with Henry is on the rocks, tells him, “Goodbye, Henry.” While this line seems final, and lyrically appears to signify the end of their relationship, at the last second, Natalie’s melody lifts up a step.

Expressive

45 me. 46 NATALIE: 47 *poco rit.* 48 *A tempo* 49 50 HENRY: Natalie. Natalie, wait up. *poco rit.*

Good-bye Hen - ry.

Vln. + Vcl. Vcl.

Cym. (roll)

Gtr.

mp Fm7(add4) Bb7sus4 Eb7sus2/G Eb6(add2)/G EbMa7sus/G

Bs. (tacet)

Attacca #22 Seconds and Years

226

As a result, the chord transforms into one that requires resolution, which does not occur in the music here. This gives the audience hope that Natalie's and Henry's relationship is not over, after all.

Music can create irony in a song, as well. In "Seconds And Years," for example, the cheerful melody and chords belie the tense conversation occurring over them. As Doctor Madden tries to reassure Dan and Diana that memory loss is normal after receiving E.C.T., Dan responds with, "I couldn't give a flying fuck what's normal/We haven't had a normal day in years." The cheery melody his words are set to, and the bright chords underneath, add humor to the line, as they are so incongruous to what Dan is saying.

A darker example of irony occurs in "It's Gonna Be Good (Reprise)."²⁹ Dan sings the same melodic line from the initial iteration of the song, saying, "It's gonna be fine/It's gonna be fine...It's gonna be good you'll see." However, the chords underneath are now dissonant, and clash with the melody.

The image displays a musical score for the song "It's Gonna Be Good (Reprise)". It features a vocal line (treble clef) and piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The score is divided into measures 21 through 25. The lyrics are: "It's gon-na be good you'll see. It's gon-na be good you'll see. It's was his name? was his name?". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings: *p sub.*, *f*, *p*, and *f*. The vocal line has a melodic line that is repeated in measures 21, 23, and 25, with a slight variation in measure 24. The piano accompaniment provides a harmonic foundation, with chords that are dissonant in the later measures, creating a sense of tension and irony.

²⁹ Taking place immediately after "How Could I Ever Forget," in which Diana and Dan recall their son's death, this reprise finds Dan struggling to maintain control of the situation before destroying Gabe's music box in a fit of rage.

The music contradicts Dan's words even as he speaks them; there is no doubt in the audience's minds that things will certainly not be "good" after this song.

Another technique Kitt uses in the score of *Next to Normal* is counterpoint, which occurs when two different melodies are woven together, so that two characters are singing different things at the same time.³⁰ Counterpoint can set up comparisons between different characters and moments, or increase urgency in a scene.³¹ For example, Dan and Diana sing counterpoint to each other in "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I," both reprising earlier vocal lines from the song.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I" from the musical *Next to Normal*. The score is written for two vocal parts, Dan and Diana, and includes piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score is divided into two systems, with measures 222-227 in the first system and measures 228-233 in the second system. The vocal parts are written in treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is written in bass clef. The lyrics are as follows:

222 (DAN) old. 223 DIANA: And though he'll nev - er hold me 224 he'll 225 226 227

228 al - ways take my calls. 229 It's tru - ly like he 230 231 232 233

sex was sim - ply in - spired. Now there's no sex, she's de - pressed,

The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (mp, mf, pp), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (e.g., "w/Vln.", "w/Gtr. p - light and feathery Ebm7", "w/light cym's", "w/light cym's"). The piano accompaniment features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some chords and arpeggios.

³⁰ This is separate from harmony, in which the same melody is split into multiple notes and parts.

³¹ A famous example of counterpoint lies in "A Boy Like That" from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*. In this piece, Anita furiously tells Maria why she cannot stay with Tony on a vocal line that is harsh, rhythmic, and staccato. Maria then begins to sing over that line on a soaring, lyrical counterpoint as she confesses that she still loves him. The contrast between the two parts heightens the emotion and drama of the scene (Franceschina 194).

The pairing of these particular lines sets up a curious comparison. Dan sings about the deterioration of his and Diana's sexual and physical relationship, saying, "And she was wicked and wired./The sex was simply inspired./Now there's no sex, she's depressed,/And me I'm just tired." Meanwhile, Diana sings about the deterioration of her and Dan's emotional relationship, saying of her psychopharmacologist, "And though he'll never hold me,/He'll always take my calls..." She implies that although she is not sexually intimate with her psychopharmacologist, he listens to her far more than Dan does. This is an early warning that Dan and Diana's relationship is unhealthy, and that the two prioritize different things in their marriage.

Kitt further explores Dan and Diana's relationship by using music to illustrate Dan's attempts to create a normal life for his family by incessantly cutting Diana off, shutting her down, and controlling her. For example, at the end of Diana's "Didn't I See This Movie?" there is an abrupt transition into Dan's "A Light In The Dark" that cuts her off mid-sentence:

83 (ad lib...) 84 85 ritard

out. Synth, Vcl. (out) I'm walk - ing +Cym. roll

A E 3 3 3 3 A

w/Bs. Drum fill J

Segue to #18 Light In The Dark

107

Instead of finishing her sentence, "I'm walking out," the music immediately jumps to the opening chords of "A Light In The Dark." The music reflects what occurs in the scene, where Dan convinces Diana, who is prepared to leave her doctor instead of receiving E.C.T., to undergo

treatment for it, against her initial desires. The music illustrates how Dan takes control of the situation and makes Diana's decisions for her.

This happens again in "Better Than Before," while Diana and Natalie share a brief moment of connection as they reflect on their troubled relationship. Dan leaps into the moment, singing, "You're getting it/You've got it, Di/Hooray!" The music aids Dan in this intrusion; the key changes abruptly from B to G major in this moment, effectively cutting Diana off again and putting Dan back in control of the situation.

These are only a few examples of the many ways in which Tom Kitt used music to create character and action in *Next to Normal*. His detailed score added a depth to the show that gave me many avenues of expression to explore with my actors. Kitt's work also gave me a comprehensive understanding of the various ways in which music can be used to generate emotion, further the plot, and complicate character, a lesson that I will carry forward in my future music directing.

Lyrics

Lyrics are, of course, another major component of interpreting the music of *Next to Normal*. Just as Kitt wrote musical motifs into the score, Yorkey wrote lyrical metaphors and used recurring images. Prevalent metaphors I found central to the show include ones that allude to climbing, falling, and flying, as they pertain to mental illness and the Goodmans' family dynamic.

In "I Miss The Mountains," Diana reminisces on the highs and lows of living with bipolar disorder before she began taking medication, and realizes that she actually misses them when compared with the cool neutrality of her drug-induced calm. The song's journey leads to her dumping out her pills and going off her medication, a catalyst for the proceeding events of the show. In the opening line of this piece, Diana sings wistfully, "There was a time when I flew higher/Was a time the wild girl running free/ Would be me" (m. 2-6). She sings of how she misses the hills and valleys of her illness, "all the climbing/All the falling" m. 30), and that she is willing to pay the price of the pain in order to feel alive again.

Curiously, the same traits that Diana dismisses as a disingenuous way of living, Dan prizes. Diana notes that while on medication, "My mind is somewhere hazy/My feet are on the ground...Everything is perfect/Nothing's real" (m. 40-42). She despises being stuck on the ground when she so strongly remembers how good it felt to fly. Meanwhile, Dan echoes this phrase in "I've Been," frustratedly singing, "And whenever she goes flying/I keep my feet right on the ground." While Diana at this point sees being "on the ground" as boring, Dan sees it as a source of stability, and necessary to keep his family together.

This metaphor continues in "Superboy And The Invisible Girl." Frustrated at being ignored by her family, Natalie sings of how her late brother is viewed as the perfect son, a

“superboy,” while she is rendered invisible by his memory, saying, “I wish I could fly/And magically appear and disappear./I wish I could fly/I’d fly far away from here.” When she expresses this desire, her metaphor is twofold. It connects to this piece’s imagery of a superhero, and Natalie’s desire to be viewed in the same way that her brother is, as a model child, but it also relates to the description of Diana’s illness as “flying.” In “I Miss The Mountains,” Diana longs for the highs and lows she experienced before receiving medication for her bipolar disorder, saying, “There was a time when I flew higher.” Later, in “I’ve Been,” Dan explains how he remains grounded during Diana’s bouts of delusion and manic episodes, saying, “Whenever she goes flying, I keep my feet right on the ground.” This ascension is associated with Diana acting selfishly, of acting without a worry of how doing so will affect her family. So, when Natalie sings of wanting to fly, she is expressing not only her desire to escape from a family that cannot provide her with the support she desires, but her desire to act selfishly for once as well, instead of constantly having to center her life around her mother’s episodes. This sentiment is actualized when she agrees to try marijuana for the first time at the end of this song, leading to her “flying” for a good portion of the show afterwards.

In “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling,” the Goodmans sing, “Catch me I’m falling/Please hear me calling/Catch me before it’s too late,” representing their loss of control over their respective lives and their relationships to each other. These lyrics contrast sharply with the reprise of this song, in which Diana chooses to leave Doctor Madden in order to pursue a form of self-sufficiency and support. Here, she sings, “Watch me I’m falling/Maybe the falling/Isn’t so bad after all./Watch me I’m falling./Watch me I’m flying./Somehow surviving.” While falling is a passive act, flying implies agency, which signifies a huge change in Diana’s character. For much of *Next to Normal*, she is a passive character, letting Dan shepherd her from

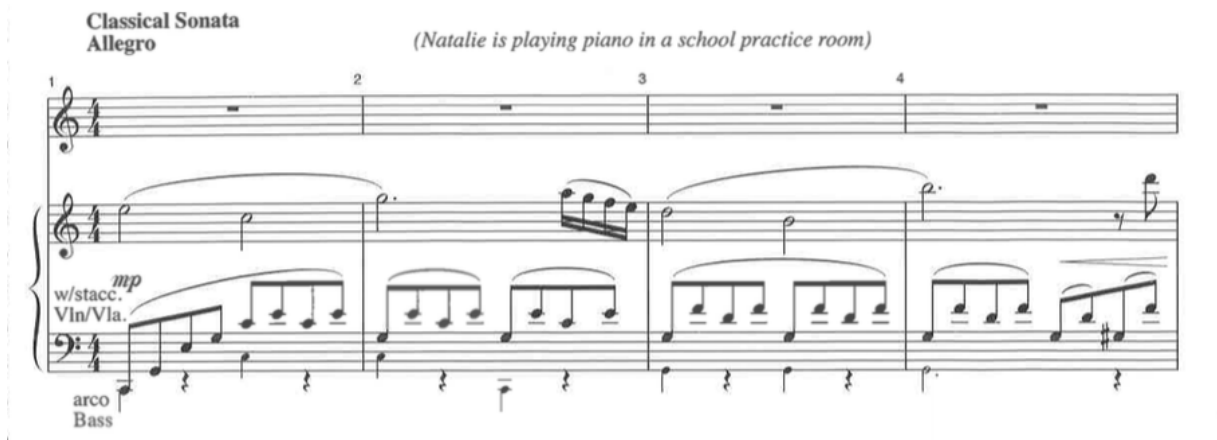
treatment to treatment, and doing as her therapists say. Here, however, she makes the decision to take back control of her life.

Outside References

Throughout the score of *Next to Normal*, Kitt and Yorkey also reference numerous outside sources, both musically and lyrically. This is common for musicals, as many pay homage to their theatrical history through self-referential jokes and commentary. Some of these references are to other musicals, while in other places reference is made to works of literature or famous films. These references are more than just sly moments slipped in by Kitt and Yorkey for clever theatre-goers to catch, however; each serves a unique purpose to further the story.

In “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” commercial-like voices list all of the drugs Diana has tried over sixteen years of medicating her illness, singing, “Zoloft and Paxil and Buspar and Xanax, Depakote, Klonopin, Ambien, Prozac. Ativan calms me when I see the bills; these are a few of my favorite pills.” This is a nod to the iconic Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Sound of Music* number, “My Favorite Things,” in which Maria lists all of the bright cheerful things she thinks of, such as, “Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,” so that, “When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I’m feeling sad, I simply remember my favorite things and then I don’t feel so bad” (Rodgers and Hammerstein). In *The Sound of Music*, these pleasant images ward off Maria’s negative emotions and troubling thoughts; in *Next to Normal*, pills serve the same purpose. The allusion is a tactic Kitt and Yorkey use to normalize the medication of mental illness. By showing medication prescribed by a therapist as a modern equivalent of how Maria treats her fears, they transform pills from something taboo into a normal part of some people’s lives.

In “Everything Else,” Natalie professes her love for Mozart’s works. The accompaniment of the song mimics Mozart’s sonatas, precise and clear in tone.



Natalie plays while she sings, noting that, “Mozart was crazy...but his music’s not crazy. It’s balanced, it’s nimble, it’s crystalline clear.” The choice Kitt and Yorkey make to pair Natalie with Mozart, making the reference in both the music and lyrics of the score, is significant: Certain classical composers, like Chopin, for example, allow the performer to take certain liberties with the tempo and expression of their pieces. With Mozart, however, the pianist must play the piece exactly how it is written on the page; every crescendo, every ritardando is precisely notated so that there will be no deviation from one performance to another. Natalie, whose home life is unpredictable from day to day, craves stability, and relishes how closely the piece controls her.

At measure 33, however, there is a huge shift in the music through measure 48, as the rhythm transitions from a steady quarter note beat to a contemporary pulsing dotted quarter note beat.

31 32 33 Flowing 34

Eve - ry - thing else goes a - way. And you play 'til it's per - fect, you pay 'til you ache, you

Vln. mp

mf

w/Vcl. (sust.)

Natalie sings: “And you play ‘til it’s perfect, you play ‘til you ache. You play ‘till the strings or your fingernails break, so you’ll rock that recital and get into Yale, and you won’t feel so sick, and you won’t look so pale. And you’ve got your full ride and your early admit, and you’re done with this school and with all of this shit. And you graduate early, you’re gone as of May, and there’s nothing your paranoid parents can say.” These lyrics, set to this driving rhythm, give the sensation of Natalie tumbling forward in space. The break from Mozart’s classical style symbolizes a loss of control, as Natalie veers from rehearsing her piece into pushing back against the pressures she juggles as a member of the Goodman family. In fact, this sets up a key dichotomy of Natalie: she lives a controlled, routine life, but actually fights against her own nature to do so. This pattern bubbles to the surface throughout the rest of *Next to Normal*.

In “Didn’t I See This Movie?” Diana references numerous poets and pieces of media as Doctor Madden encourages her to undergo E.C.T. First, she demands to know, “Didn’t I see this movie/With McMurphy and the nurse/That hospital was heavy/But this cuckoo’s nest is worse,” referencing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, in which the main character receives a lobotomy and is rendered a vegetable. She also makes reference to Sylvia Plath, the acclaimed poet and author of *The Bell Jar* who committed suicide after struggling with therapy and mental illness for

years, and to Frances Farmer, the actress committed to a mental hospital after struggling with various mental disorders.

The reason for these references is twofold. First, it illustrates Diana's fear of undergoing E.C.T. She does not see herself as crazy, or dangerous, or deserving of receiving shock treatment to her brain, and is terrified of the potential side effects of the treatment. Secondly, the references acknowledge that the only basis much of the general public has for knowledge of treatment for mental illness is what they have seen in movies or read about in famous cases. Of course, this is not an accurate representation of what it is like to live with and treat mental illness; Kitt and Yorkey openly examine sensationalized cases in this song to force the audience to look at the bias surrounding such illnesses and treatments.

Music Directing *Next to Normal*:

The Process and Production at Bucknell University

Working With Actors

Before entering the rehearsal period, I conducted research on whether certain roles in the original production of *Next to Normal* had been written with specific actors in mind. In terms of approaching each role with my actors, it was vital to know the type of voice the composer envisioned for each role. While my goal was never to recreate a specific sound or interpretation, the knowledge came in handy in other ways. For example, Kitt worked closely with Aaron Tveit, the actor who originated the role of Gabe on Broadway, while finessing the show's music. In his "Sound Off" interview, he says, "The thing about Aaron's character is that I always wanted that character to be a true tenor and to have a boy's-sounding voice in an adult body, and Aaron has this uncanny instrument where his voice doesn't break - he actually wants things written higher for him!" (Cerasaro 2) Understanding that many of Gabe's songs were modified to fit Tveit's unusually high tenor voice allowed me to help Brendan Trybus, playing Gabe in our production, work safely to hit some of those high notes, and gave me leave to melodically modify certain lines that were written in too strenuous a place for Brendan's voice. Kitt acknowledged as well in the same interview that he always had Alice Ripley's voice in mind for the role of Diana while writing *Next to Normal*. Ripley's voice is naturally raw and fragile, which lends itself well to the emotionally intense songs that Diana performs; I worked with Mukta Phatak, the actress playing Diana in our production, to capture the intensity required of Diana in her own vocal style, so that she focused on the character rather than on the voice that originated the role.

One of the first notes I gave the *Next to Normal* ensemble at the start of the rehearsal process was that in contemporary musical theatre, the music is less about singing and more about acting on a pitch.³² Acting on a pitch differs from merely singing in a variety of ways. In popular music, for example, vocalists work to sing as impressively as possible and show off range and

³² See Appendix 8

vocal capabilities. Performers might add riffs³³ and physical gestures that have little to do with the song's narrative. While some musicians do sing more “storyteller”-based songs, most popular music does not create a dynamic arc for characters, or further their development in the way musical theatre pieces do. In *Next to Normal*, on the other hand, the actors sing to further the show in some way, be it through plot or character development. Therefore, everything in the actors' performances must aid their purpose. This means that any changes an actor makes to the melodic line must be justified by an acting intention; it does not matter how impressive a high note or riff is if it does not aid the character or plot in some way. In fact, excessive alteration and ornamentation of the score can actually detract from the emotion and objective of the song. For example, in Diana's “Didn't I See This Movie?” there is a measure towards the end of the song in which Kitt instructs the actor to ad lib:

The image shows a musical score for the song "Didn't I See This Movie?" from the musical *Next to Normal*. The score is written for voice and piano. The voice part starts at measure 83 with the instruction "(ad lib...)" above it. The piano part includes chords A and E, and a drum fill. The score ends at measure 85 with the instruction "ritard" above it. The lyrics "I'm walk - ing" are written below the voice part. The score is marked "Segue to #18 Light In The Dark".

This is highly unusual for musical theatre: composers rarely give actors the freedom to interpret part of the music for themselves. In doing so, Kitt trusted the actress and music director to interpret the score themselves, and to make honest acting choices through it. A massive advantage of an ad lib is that, theoretically, the actress playing Diana could improvise it differently every night, according to what her emotional state required in each individual

³³ A short, often improvised series of notes put together in a quick run. Riffing shows off vocal flexibility and creativity, and is often considered the pop equivalent of scatting.

performance. However, Mukta said that she would be more comfortable setting a unique ad lib and using it for the course of the performance, so we developed one together. At first, she created an ad lib that was vocally impressive, but that seemed disconnected from Diana's character and the situation she was in. As I phrased it to Mukta, "There has to be a reason for this riff." After working on it together, Mukta came up with an ad lib that, while not as challenging vocally, seemed to match Diana's frustration and feeling of being trapped in that scene. Overall, it fit the show better.

In "I Miss The Mountains," on the other hand, Mukta created a small melodic alteration that I thought aided her interpretation of the song. Towards the end of the piece, Diana sings, "I miss the mountains/I miss the lonely climb/Wand'ring through the wilderness/And spending all my time/Where the air is clear/And cuts you like a knife." The written melody for, "And spending all my time," descends through the word "my."



Mukta, however, chose to sing a higher A note on "my," making it the highest note of the phrase. From a music composition perspective, this emphasized the fact that it was *her* time, not Dan's or anybody else's, and that she alone should get to choose how she spends it. Since Diana chooses at the end of the song to throw away her medication so that she can once again experience the highs and lows of her bipolar disorder, and regain the life that her medication took away, I found Mukta's alteration useful for the audience's understanding of Diana's character. We kept it in the show.

The idea of acting on a pitch was also incredibly helpful for Patrick, who had less acting experience than his fellow castmates going in, as he had performed in his first musical only a year ago. He therefore had difficulty at first carrying his character interpretation over into his singing. Encouraging him to treat each song as a way to further explore his character's relationships with the other characters in the play, instead of worrying about if his singing was "beautiful" enough, strengthened his performance significantly over the course of the rehearsal process.³⁴

I began working on the vocal style of the actors early on in the process. *Next to Normal* requires a more contemporary, pop-rock style of sound than traditionally found in musical theatre. This involves the vocalist placing their sound into their facial mask more, which creates the forward resonance that is a hallmark of contemporary singing. Contemporary singing is also often conversational; the actor's singing voice matches his or her speaking voice fairly closely. For some of my actors, this was not an issue, as they were accustomed to performing contemporary pieces. However, I had to work with Kyle especially to develop his contemporary sound, so that his voice would not sound out of place in the show. Kyle came into the rehearsal process with a rounded choral tone, with soft consonants and exaggeratedly pure vowels. While perfect for choral singing, as it allows for great blend, this style sounds out of place in a solo voice, especially for this contemporary style of show. To remedy this, I had Kyle speak his lyrics before singing them, so that he could hear where he placed and formed vowels and consonants in his speaking voice. I then had him sing the same lyrics using that same placement from speaking them previously. Some words proved more challenging than others. In his song, "Perfect For You," for instance, Kyle had difficulty singing the title phrase in a contemporary style, as he kept dropping the "r" of "perfect" and rounding the "ooh" vowel of "you." We spent many sessions

³⁴ Appendix 9 details the process I used to work with Patrick on this technique.

simply practicing this challenging phrase. I also had him sing his lines on a “nyah” syllable instead of on the words, as this syllable automatically makes the singer place his or her tone into a more nasally, contemporary-sounding place. These exercises helped Kyle immensely, and he rapidly developed a contemporary tone.³⁵

I also focused intently on vocal technique. The voice is a muscle, and like any other muscle in the body, it must be exercised properly to strengthen and maintain it. Otherwise, injury can occur. Vocal warm-ups were a crucial part of every rehearsal.³⁶ During this time I focused on three main areas: body, breath, and vocalises.

It is imperative for the body to be physically aligned when warming up for the actor to produce optimal sound. Therefore, I began by having my actors center themselves, balancing their weight so that they were leaning neither on their heels nor their toes, keeping their knees slightly bent, stacking their heads and necks straight on top of their spines, and letting go of any tension in their bodies. This neutral position allows for the most ease in producing sound.

Proper breathing is also crucial for a healthy, supported sound. After I made sure that the actors were all in a neutral physical position, I led them through a series of breathing exercises designed to teach them how to draw in a full breath, which is something we often take for granted. Singing requires a deeper breath than the shallow breathing we often use in our daily lives. I also had them practice controlling their flow of air from a breath when producing sound. To accomplish this, I had them draw in a breath on a specific number of counts, then breath out on a hiss for a specific number of counts. This allowed them to become accustomed to using the necessary amount of air to sustain a sound over a period of time.

³⁵ See Appendix 8 for more detail.

³⁶ My specific warm-ups for each day are detailed in my rehearsal journal (Appendix 9).

After this, I led a series of vocalises, or vocal warm-ups, focusing on three vocal registers: head, mix, and chest.³⁷ I instructed my actors to think of these registers less as separate entities and more as existing on a scale, where each register blends seamlessly into the next. Head voice, named for the vibrations singing in this register produces in the facial cavities, consists of the upper range of a singer's voice. Since this register produces a more classical tone, we did not use it frequently in singing *Next to Normal*. However, singing in head voice requires strong vocal technique, so using it in our warm-ups taught my cast how to properly use their voices, and benefited their singing in other registers as well. Chest voice rests in a lower, "speaking" register. Singers use chest voice to produce a style of singing popular in contemporary and pop music known as belting. Mix voice constitutes a blend of the head and chest registers. It is where a lot of musical theatre singing rests, as singing in mix often sounds light and conversational, a useful tool for story-based music.

Brendan and I spent significant time working on his technique during rehearsals. Many of the songs for his character, Gabe, contained long stretches of music in which he was required to sustain notes in the upper ranges of his chest voice. This required him to build vocal stamina and stronger belting technique, lest he strain his voice and cause injury to it. To help him, I first worked on Brendan's physical alignment when belting. He had the habit of pushing his neck forward when belting, which was making it harder for him to sing, as it forced the muscles in his throat to clench and inhibit the sound. To remedy this, I led him through exercises that forced him to release these muscles and engage his abdominals instead, which would produce a healthier, supported tone. For example, I had him push against my hands with his full strength as he sang: the physical exertion forced him to utilize the muscles in his abdomen, which in turn

³⁷ Vocal register refers to a set of pitches that all have the same quality of sound in a singer's voice. While head (and falsetto for men), mix, and chest are considered the main registers of the voice, vocal fry and whistle tone can also be thought of as registers (O'Connor 1).

produced a fuller, stronger belt. We then worked on achieving this support without him having to push against my hand. We also worked on placing his tone, creating more backspace for the sound to resonate, so that his tone remained one of singing and not of screaming. Towards the end of the rehearsal period, Brendan's vocal stamina and support had improved considerably. However, there were still a few melodic lines that he struggled to sing consistently because of the challenging nature of their range. As we approached the performance date, I made the executive decision to alter them, so that he would sing a few lower notes comfortably, instead of straining for a few higher notes that were still out of his range. In this circumstance, I found it wiser for Brendan to focus on acting the songs strongly, without worrying about whether he would hit a few notes correctly during the performance. Overall, these small changes did not detract from his character or my interpretation of the show, as he was still able to justify the music through his acting.

I also worked closely with Midge on her belting technique, as her character, Natalie, has several songs that require a higher belt than many singers are accustomed to. For example, in "Make Up Your Mind," Midge had to belt a high F, which is higher than her normal belting range. If she did not use proper technique to sustain this note, she not only risked having the note sound unsupported, but damaging her voice as well. Therefore, I spent a considerable amount of time with her working on her belt, using the pushing technique I had used with Brendan to ensure that she was engaging the correct muscles in her body. It was incredibly rewarding to hear her belt growing stronger over the rehearsal process; by the show it was fully supported and healthy.

Additionally, I encouraged my actors to find different vocal textures and approaches to the music, to give their performances more depth. For example, when Mukta and I first began

working on “I Miss The Mountains,” she was belting the entire ending at top volume, which, while vocally impressive, did little for Diana’s character, and would tire her voice out by the end of the show. Instead, we worked on pulling the volume back and incorporating more of her mix voice into the piece, which actually forced her to make stronger acting choices, as she could no longer rely on pure vocal exertion to create the emotion for her. Mukta found this key to maintaining her character interpretation through the music, writing in her post-production survey, “Sometimes, when you conserve yourself vocally, you are forced to make stronger acting choices physically, or you have to justify a choice to not belt a note full-out.”³⁸ Similarly, I worked with Midge in “Superboy And The Invisible Girl” to vary the vocal registers she used while singing, finding places to add texture, instead of belting the entire time.

In terms of coaching the ensemble numbers, I focused first on teaching notes, rhythms, and harmonies. I accomplished this by working with one actor or vocal part at a time, depending on what the song called for. I would play the individual harmony for an actor on the piano, then have him or her sing along. Once I had fixed any rhythmic or melodic errors, I would move on to teaching the next part. When I felt the actors were prepared, I would layer the different harmonies on top of each other. Some group numbers were more straightforward than others: Nick, Mukta, and Midge quickly picked up their harmonies in “Song of Forgetting,” and needed very little refreshing on those harmonies throughout the process. Songs like “It’s Gonna Be Good” and “Wish I Were Here,” however, required running several times a week from the top of our rehearsal period through the shows, where we would run them before every performance to make sure they stayed tight. This was because the harmonies for these pieces were more intricate and dissonant than, say, “Song of Forgetting.” Since the notes were less intuitive to the actors,

³⁸ See Appendix 12.

they had a more challenging time singing them against several other equally challenging harmonic lines.

Only once the melodic groundwork was solid did I move on to shaping the song. This involved several components. I looked at the style of each piece, which I had explored in my music analysis, and determined what the style required of the actors. For example, there is a portion of “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I” in which the style moves from the straight eighth notes of a waltz into the swung eighth notes of a jazz waltz. As this occurs, the characters of Natalie, Gabe, Dan, and Henry sing the transcribed equivalent of a jazz scat.³⁹

Jazz Waltz (swing ♩'s) **DR. FINE:** Goodman, Diana. Bipolar depressive with delusional episodes...

98 **NATALIE:** *mf* 99 100 *p* 101 102 103

— Doo doo

GABE, DAN
HENRY: *mf* *p*

Doo doo

Gtr. 8vb

mf Gm⁹ Jazz comping a la Dave Brubeck Gm⁹/D Gm⁹ Gm⁹/D Gm F⁶

w/Bs. Drs: time

When coaching this section, I focused on where my actors’ usual style of singing needed to differ here. For Midge, we worked on giving her tone a bit more “bounce”: she had been smoothing out her phrases, making them too legato for this particular section. I worked on the swung style of this section with Kyle, who had trouble at first differentiating the rhythm from

³⁹ Since scatting is improvised, the actors are not truly scatting in this section, but Kitt has captured its essence in this section.

that of straight eighth notes. And I worked with all four actors here on emphasizing the downbeat of each measure, to add the correct pulse to this passage.

I also looked at dynamics for each piece: the volume of sound each passage of music required, where a crescendo or decrescendo might heighten the audience's experience of a piece, and where I needed more volume from one actor and less from another to achieve a balance of sound. Dynamics are especially critical when working ensemble numbers, as they must be exaggerated in order to be distinguished. An actor singing a solo piece can afford to use more subtle dynamic changes; in a group however, they must work to sing noticeably more softly or loudly in order to make these changes heard. We therefore spent a good amount of time practicing creating effective dynamic changes within group numbers.

Similarly, the diction of the ensemble pieces needed to be exaggerated as well in order to be effective. Consonants and vowels had to be over-pronounced in order for the words to be intelligible to an audience. This was especially important for pieces in which the lyrics move very rapidly, such as "It's Gonna Be Good," and "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I," in which the actors must sing together very quickly. Poor diction would make their singing sounding sloppy; to avoid this, we often warmed up with diction exercises as well to get them accustomed to exaggerating their words in group numbers.

We also worked on their vocal blend as an ensemble, to make their sound more cohesive. There were many places in which I asked Nick and Mukta, both of whom have naturally loud voices, to pull back on volume in order to blend better with the other actors. I also had to be aware of when Brendan used falsetto on his higher harmonies, such as at the end of "Superboy And The Invisible Girl." Since Midge was full belting her harmony against Brendan's, the blend was off-balance at first. To remedy this, I asked Midge to incorporate a bit more of her mix into

her sound, which balanced better with Brendan's falsetto. I also made sure that the actors were in agreement on when they would sing with vibrato, and when they would sing with straight tone. For example, at the end of "Finale: Light," the actors were initially using different tones to sing the final held note of the song. To fix this, I suggested they sing the first four beats of the note on a straight tone, and then break together into vibrato. This cohesive movement created a powerful ending moment when done in unison.

When working with the actors, I focused as much on how the music needed to influence their vocal and acting-based interpretation as I did on making sure that they were singing their correct harmonies and using strong vocal technique. I used a variety of tactics to achieve this, often starting with assigning the actors the task of finding their characters' objectives in each song. This activates the piece, turning it from a melody into a tool for the actor to achieve this objective. It was important, however, for the actors to choose what I call "playable objectives." A playable objective is one that can be achieved over the course of a song. For example, when I worked "Superboy And The Invisible Girl" with Midge, the objective she initially chose for her character, Natalie, was to gain more attention from her family, and erase her brother's memory. However, we found that this objective was too overarching, too broad, for it to be playable; it was simply not possible for her to succeed in this endeavor over the course of a few minutes of music. Instead, we specified the objective into Natalie wanting an apology from her mother in that moment. This gave her something specific to work towards, and allowed her to employ various tactics within the song to achieve her goal.⁴⁰

I also had the actors speak their songs as monologues. Sometimes, the actors got so caught up in their singing that they forgot acting a song requires the same care as acting a monologue; temporarily removing music from the equation allowed them to hone in on their

⁴⁰ See Appendix 8 for further detail on working with playable objectives.

acting choices within the lyrics of the piece. It also highlighting where different choices needed to be made. For example, when Nick and I worked on Dan's "I Am The One," we discussed his character's repetition of the phrase, "I am..." at the top of every line of the refrain.⁴¹ When a composer repeats a phrase several times within a song, it is important for the actor to examine why this repetition occurs. It can indicate a key to understanding a character; the composer may also intend for there to be a different nuance to each iteration of the line. Nick and I spoke through "I Am The One" as a monologue to find different ways to emphasize his repeated lines.

Conversely, I also emphasized the importance of the orchestration in interpreting a song. Often, performers think that in order to act the song, they must ignore the orchestration. In reality, if they allow it to help them, the orchestration can provide subtext and another layer to their acting choices. As Midge noted in her post-production survey, "This show taught me how to act...because I finally learned how to marry singing and acting into one art form...By helping us find musical hints and messages that are interspersed throughout the score, Goldie [Alex] taught us so much more about our characters than we ever would have known ourselves...we had an extra key to character exploration, and by combining what we knew musically with what we were exploring with Dustyn in the libretto, we could embody these characters in every aspect..."⁴² By examining where and why changes in the music occur, which words receive emphasis in the music, and where dynamic contrasts occur, my actors were able to create nuanced interpretations for each song.

While I employed many tactics and strategies, detailed in my rehearsal journal, to help my actors heighten their performances, there were a few that I found absolutely essential to my

⁴¹ In "I Am The One," Dan tries to convince Diana of his love for her by listing all of the different ways in which he has protected her, and stayed by her side through her illness. He sings, "I am the one who knows you/I am the one who cares/I am the one who's always been there."

⁴² See Appendix 12.

process. For example, I drove home the idea of the eighty-twenty rule. This is the concept that in a performance, an actor can put eighty percent of himself into the mindset of his character: that character's objectives, emotions, and relationships to other characters become his own, to an extent. However, twenty percent of his mind must remain in control of himself as an actor. This is especially important for a show such as *Next to Normal*, where disappearing completely into a character could cause serious emotional distress and, from a musical point of view, vocal damage as well. The twenty percent of the mind that remains cognizant of the performance allows the actor to rely on technique to keep himself healthy and safe throughout a performance. This was a note I gave often to Mukta, who had the tendency to throw herself completely into her character, and who would often risk losing control of herself in the process. While working with her, we created a mantra that she found helpful: "You are in control, even when Diana is not." This gave her permission to hold onto her craft as an actor; she stopped over-exerting herself physically and vocally during the show, which allowed her to sustain the performance over several hours each night and for multiple consecutive shows. It also did not detract in any way from her believability as Diana – in fact, keeping a tighter reign on herself allowed her to focus her performance and make stronger acting and vocal choices. As Mukta explained in her post-production survey, "Two acts as Diana is vocally taxing, and reminding my actor-self of that during shows was very important and something I learned to work with."⁴³

Similarly, I worked with my actors on getting out of their own way, so to speak, during performances. For example, Mukta had a habit of flailing her arms and using extreme physical movement to create emotional intensity during her song "The Break." As an exercise, I forced her to sing it while sitting in a chair, occupying her hands by focusing on folding a piece of paper into a paper airplane, and to only look up from her task when she found it absolutely necessary.

⁴³ See Appendix 12.

By concentrating her energy in this way, I was able to help Mukta channel it into a more honest and raw emotional performance, instead of allowing her emotion to dissipate through distracting physical gesture. I used the same paper-folding trick with Nick when working “I’ve Been.”

Another concept my actors found extremely useful was that of “growing notes.” This is the idea that when a note is held during a song, there should always be a dynamic change during that held note, whether that change is growing softer or louder. Since music is experienced temporally, a static note in which no change occurs can lower the energy of a moment for an audience, and pull them out of the performance. Growing notes activate the moment for actor and audience and keep the song moving forward from both a musical and acting standpoint.

Finally, I worked with my actors on dealing with an audience during a live performance. A live audience adds an unregulated element to a performance; we cannot predict with any certainty where they will laugh, applaud, or remain absolutely silent. Therefore, with a sung-through show such as *Next to Normal*, I found it crucial to practice with my actors how to handle unexpected audience reactions while singing. In an integrated show such as this one, songs and scenes blend seamlessly together into action. This is often a trademark of more contemporary shows, as opposed to traditional pieces, where characters stop a scene to burst into song. In fact, in *Next to Normal*, it is often difficult for the audience to tell when one song has ended and the next has begun, as the transitions are so fluid. Even in my piano-conductor score, the beginning of a song might actually start on the final page of the previous song, like in “I Am The One,” where Dan’s first line actually begins in the final measure of Diana’s “You Don’t Know”:

35 ev-er on the run... 36 If it gets me, it will kill me but I don't know what I've done. Can you 37 DAN: w/Perc. mp sfz Right into.

Gtr. sim. w/Gtr. E7sus mp Attacca #10

The lack of a button, a musical beat and pause at the end of a song, makes it difficult for an audience to know when to applaud. As Rosenhaus and Cohen write in *Writing Musical Theater*, “A button makes clear to the audience that the song is over, and that it is time to applaud.

Without a button the audience can become confused, unsure whether or not to applaud. The button is a long-established convention of musical theater, and audiences wishing to applaud become frustrated when a button does not appear at the end of a song" (137). Most of the songs in *Next to Normal* lack this. I had experience with an audience's reaction to this type of musical from my performance in *Spring Awakening* last year, where songs similarly bled into each other, leaving the audience confused as to when to clap. Often, they would begin to clap as the next song was beginning, which at first threw us off as performers until we learned to anticipate applause from the audience at unexpected points. I imparted this knowledge into my actors, so that they would be prepared to sing over audience applause if necessary, or hold off before beginning to sing the next piece if possible to allow the audience time to applaud.

Tech Week

Tech week is the theatrical term for the days leading up to a show opening in which all technical elements of the show are incorporated into the production. Starting the Friday before opening night, we added microphones, sound, lighting, costumes, props, hair, and makeup throughout the course of the week.

One of the biggest challenges I faced this week was working with our sound designer Professor Heath Hansum and our Audio Technicians Drew Hopkins and Allen Taylor to properly mix each actor's voice using microphones, and balancing their voices with the prerecorded tracks. I sat with Drew, who would be running the microphones for the shows, during each tech rehearsal, to inform him when actors would be singing offstage, when someone's microphone volume needed to be raised or lowered to create the blend I desired, and when I wanted particular sections of songs to stand out. For example, in "Wish I Were Here," Nick, Brendan, and Kyle sing offstage for a majority of the song. Since Drew was automatically turning their microphones off when they exited the stage, I needed to make a note for him to keep their microphones on for their harmonies. In "Just Another Day," I had Drew raise Brendan's microphone level for the last section in which all of the characters sing together; since Brendan sings in falsetto here, his voice is naturally softer than the others actors, and his microphone needed to amplify him so that his harmony would be heard. This was challenging because there are so many places throughout the show where minor adjustments needed to be made to produce a proper blend of sound; often Drew would be mixing voices while also tracking microphone entrances and exits, and it took several days for us to achieve the desired mix.

The acoustics of the black box also made working with sound challenging. Even when the musical tracks were loud enough for the audience, the actors onstage struggled to hear them,

but if we pushed the music too loud, the audience would be unable to make out the characters' lines. Additionally, the music for large group numbers, such as "Just Another Day," "My Psychopharmacologist And I," and "Wish I Were Here," needed to be significantly louder than the music for solo numbers and softer ballads, such as "There's A World" and "A Light In The Dark." Drew, Heath, and I worked throughout the week to find a balance that would work for both actor and audience.

Allen and I also worked together to figure out a way to cue the actors for vamp lines during their songs. In the music of *Next to Normal*, there are several measures that "vamp," or repeat indefinitely until an actor's dialogue has ended and they are ready to move to the next set of lyrics. Had we a live orchestra, the musicians would simply vamp under the actor and take their cue from that actor to move on. However, with the prerecorded tracks the number of vamps was set, and the actors would have to time how long they had to say certain lines. In rehearsal, I cued them vocally to continue, but this of course would not be an option during the show. We considered having them memorize their vamp timing, but in the scene, and with some vamps that lasted for eighteen or more measures, that would have been extraordinarily difficult to perfect. Instead, Allen and I eventually settled on programming a visual cue into one of the show lights, so that a blue light that only the actors could see would flash when the actors had to continue onto their next line. We rehearsed with this vamp light throughout the week so that the actors could grow more confident with it.

We experienced some technical difficulties with the microphones over the course of the week. Our department generally does not produce musicals in the Tustin black box, as it is a more intimate space and more difficult to properly mic – the sound systems produced a lot of feedback into the microphones at first. We also had to work on finding a microphone level and

quality that would amplify the actors' voices in a natural way, so that the sound still seemed to come from them and not from the sound systems above the audience's heads. Occasionally too much reverb entered the microphones, making the actors sound like they were singing at a pop concert, so we had to keep adjusting those levels during the tech process as well.

Performances

During tech week, Dustyn and I developed a performance routine with our actors that we continued on into the shows. At 5:00, the actors arrived at the theatre to begin getting into hair and makeup in their dressing rooms. At 5:45, they met Dustyn and me upstairs in the black box for warm-ups. Dustyn performed a series of exercises and tongue twisters with them to warm them up physically and sharpen their diction. After she finished, I ran a series of vocal warm-ups to open up their voices, expand their range, and prepare them for the challenging vocals of *Next to Normal*. Following warm up, Drew and Allen attached microphones to each actor, then ran mic check with them. For mic check, each actor walks around the stage while speaking and singing various lines from the show, so that the audio technicians can ensure that the microphones are working properly and that the levels are correct. After this, the actors head downstairs to finish getting into costume. At 7:00, Dustyn and I run a final actor group warm-up with the cast to focus them and prepare them for the performance; at this time, the house opens upstairs and the audience is free to enter the theatre. Shortly after, the actors check their props and costume pieces and get set for the top of the show.

We had our first audience on Thursday for a preview performance, also known as a “soft open.” This was a donation-only performance, with all proceeds going towards Transitions of PA. Preview performances are extremely helpful because they allow the cast to practice performing with an audience, which can drastically alter a performance. It is hard to predict where an audience will laugh or applaud during a show, or even what their reaction to certain scenes overall will be, so having fresh eyes watching the show that Thursday benefited both the cast and the creative team of the show. Having bodies in the seats also altered our sound

atmosphere, as the bodies actually absorbed some of the sound. Keeping this in mind, Drew and I agreed that the sound levels would need to be raised for the following performances.

Friday and Saturday night, I was finally able to sit back and experience the show I had been working towards producing since my first year at Bucknell. Watching the audience react through laughter and tears at my actors' work, and watching how far my cast had come since their first rehearsal, was beyond rewarding. Even with a few small technical difficulties with the microphones, the show was very well received both evenings.

Sunday morning, however, I was woken early with the news that Nick Talbot, our lead male, had become extremely ill overnight and would be unable to perform that day. After overcoming our initial shock and concern, Dustyn, our stage manager Lauren Scott, and I were faced with the task of figuring out how to proceed. We would have to move quickly, as we had approximately five hours before curtain for our matinee that afternoon. Since the show was sold out, canceling did not feel like a viable option, especially as the cast only gets to perform the show four times in a run. However, we did not have any understudies for the actors. In that moment, Dustyn told me that the most logical solution was to have me step in to play the role of Dan Goodman in that day's performance. This, of course, was not something I had anticipated having to do within my duties as a music director. However, as music director, I was intimately familiar with all of the music, and with Nick's role, having coached him in it for months. I also knew the show better than anyone we could have tried to bring in to read Nick's lines. And as a performer, I trusted myself to be able to stand in front of a couple hundred people and read lines and carry out stage movement for the first time without getting flustered or stopping the show.

So, by nine o'clock that morning, our entire cast and creative team was gathered in Tustin to discuss the plan. It was incredibly difficult to break the news to the cast that one of the people

they had worked with for months and forged a close bond with would be unable to perform that day. I was worried that I would seem like an intruder, stepping in as Dan, but fortunately the cast placed their complete trust in me to support them and help carry the show.

The next step was learning all of Nick's blocking in a matter of a couple hours. Dustyn walked me through all of his scenes and transitions, and then I ran each scene once with the cast in the short amount of time we had. While the rest of the actors left briefly to go home and prepare for the afternoon show, I stayed to refresh myself on Nick's specific harmonies for each song, and also to figure out where I might have to make adjustments to his vocal lines. Since the role is of course written for a man, some of the melodies were too low for my voice; I determined where I could sing them up the octave, where I could sing alternate notes, and where I could sing them in the original key.

Paula Davis, the head of our costume department, also came in that morning to fit me for a male costume, since Nick's costume would be far too large on me, while our hair and makeup assistant Delaney Clark determined how best to style my hair for the show, settling on a rolled French braid. Before the show, I was fitted for a microphone and underwent an extensive mic check, so that Drew could figure out how to mix my voice, which is significantly different from Nick's, to fit into the blend of the show. Before the performance, Dustyn made a pre-show announcement that I would be going on for the character of Dan, and that I would be on-book (holding the script in a binder as I performed), and then the show began. I ended up performing as Dan for the Monday night show as well.

The entire situation felt extraordinarily surreal in the moment. Truly, when we think of worst-case scenarios for shows in an academic setting, a lead with no understudy falling ill halfway through a run is very high up on the list. However, due to the nature of the situation, we

all jumped so quickly into action, working as a unified team, that I did not even have time to be terrified of whether the project I had planned for nearly three years would crash and burn if I had to play the role of Dan on-book for our final two performances.

While Dan is not a role that I could ever be cast to play in real life, I worked with the given circumstances to create a believable performance for that show. As I would never be able to recreate Nick's performance in such a short amount of time, I focused instead on supporting my fellow cast members onstage, and making sure that our show still communicated what I had set out to accomplish all along. Fortunately, based on audience feedback we were still able to achieve this.

I could never have taken on Nick's role had it not been for the extensive research and preparation I did to familiarize myself with the show as music director. While I hope never to have to step in for an actor under these circumstances again, it was in a way comforting to know that even when faced with a genuine disaster, I could fall back on my acting and music training to create a solution.

Reflections

Looking back on this process, I am filled foremost with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for everyone who has contributed to the success of this project. When I first conceived of this as idea for my senior independent study as a first-year, I could never have anticipated its scope, and the sheer number of people it would encompass. The road to closing night of *Next to Normal* was long, often challenging, and at times exhausting, but I never for a moment regretted my decision to undertake the project that has vastly shaped my trajectory as a student at Bucknell and a professional in the theatre industry.

One of my goals for this production was to shine a light on mental illness in our society; I wanted to show that mental illness is more prevalent than many people think, and that it affects us in various ways, whether we suffer from one, take care of someone with one, or simply see it portrayed in different ways in the media. The most rewarding part of this process for me came after each performance, when various audience members would approach me and describe how they had each related to a different character in the show. In *Next to Normal*, they had all found someone they could see themselves in. It is a comforting thing to know that we are not alone. If I provided even one person with a small sense of this feeling, then I believe I succeeded in my goal for this project.

I also grew immensely as a music director from this process. I was able to explore different methods of coaching vocal technique and interpretation, and learned how to work with actors coming from various musical backgrounds. I have discovered what sets my style of music direction apart from the many approaches I have experienced: when I music direct, my aim is not solely to shape the music of the show to fit my interpretation, but to educate and share the reasons behind my interpretation with my actors. My goal is to give them the tools to begin to

interpret the score for themselves as well, so that they do not have to rely on me to make their choices for them. I want the people I music direct to grow as artists through their work with me: the process is just as valuable as the result.

More broadly, my work with *Next to Normal* has given me a stronger understanding of the role of music in musical theatre. The use of music to inform direction is not something unique to *Next to Normal*, or even to contemporary musical theatre. For decades, composers have masterfully written integrated scores filled with clues to character and action. Going forward, I know now to examine every score with the same depth that I devoted to the score of *Next to Normal*. Understanding the history of the musical as an art form was key to my interpretation of the score of *Next to Normal*, as the enumerable composers and lyricists who came before Kitt and Yorkey all had a hand in influencing their work.

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26

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Supplementary Materials: Production Photos Taken By Gordon Wenzel







Appendix 1
Initial 319 Production Proposal & Supplement
Submitted to the Department of Theatre and Dance Play Selection Committee

Next to Normal by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey
 Alex Golden '17 THEA 319 Proposal
 Spring 2017
Advisor Consulted: Dustyn Martincich

Artistic Intent

Content

Mental illness is a subject often romanticized in the arts and literature. As a *New York Times* article on *Next to Normal* points out, “In Western culture psychic pain has tended to be seen as the territory of the artist, visionary, rebel and genius, from Emily Dickinson to Sylvia Plath and Friedrich Nietzsche to John Forbes Nash Jr. So it should be no surprise that madness is often used to signify creativity, sensitivity or spiritual and intellectual depth” (Cohen). Furthermore, as psychiatrist Phillip S. Freeman writes in *Against Depression*, mental illness is generally “used in a story to illustrate some idea about madness, not madness itself” (Cohen). When a character in a show suffers from depression, more often than not the mental illness is glossed over; depression acts as a trope to cast someone as an emotionally tortured, likely misunderstood artist. We have been trained to believe that mental illness is a sign of true artistry and genius: think of Vincent Van Gogh and Virginia Woolf. We do not see the ugly reality of living with such a disease. Nor do we often see theatrical depictions of “ordinary” people struggling with mental illness, and here is what makes *Next to Normal* so special: Aware of the romanticization of depression in the arts, Kitt and Yorkey were determined to dispel that notion. ““Someone said to make her a painter,’ Yorkey said of the protagonist, Diana. ‘I said no. She’s a suburban mother’” (Cohen). Kitt and Yorkey were determined to remain as faithful to the realities of living with a mental illness as possible, and to avoid merely using it for dramatic effect.

And so we are introduced to the Goodmans, a family, on the surface, no different from any other. But we soon learn that the mother, Diana, suffers from bipolar depression, which causes her to endure delusions, experience manic episodes, and even attempt suicide. The musical comprehensively explores her battle with the illness, and here again we see something unique: unlike some plays about grappling with mental illness, such as David Auburn’s *Proof*, *Next to Normal* does not focus just on Diana’s pain -- it also shows the collateral damage her illness has caused. Diana’s husband Dan is not depicted as a “bad guy” for wanting her to take medicine and undergo experimental treatments; instead, we empathize with him as he cleans bloodstains out of the carpet after Diana’s suicide attempt and asks, “Who’s crazy – the one who’s uncured?/Or maybe the one who’s endured?/The one who has treatments, or the/One who just lives with the pain?” (Kitt and Yorkey 45) Diana’s daughter, Natalie, is not left untouched. A chronic

overachiever, she desperately tries to win love from a mother who is incapable of fully giving it, and eventually turns to drugs as a method of coping, singing, “So it’s times like these I wonder how I take it./And if other families live the way we do./If they love each other or if they just fake it./And if other daughters feel like I feel, too./’Cause some days I think I’m dying/But I’m really only trying to get through” (Kitt and Yorkey 27).

This is incredibly important, as it validates the feelings of people who live out this struggle daily. According to Brian Yorkey, “Ever time I’m at the show I meet someone who’s bipolar or who grew up with a bipolar parent...there’s been someone there who says, ‘This is my story.’” (Reesman 15). Living with mental illness, or living in a home with mental illness, is isolating; it is hard to imagine that anyone could even begin to understand the intricacies and complications of this struggle. And so many feel compelled to hide this part of themselves from others, for fear of rejection at not being “normal.”

The thing is, normality itself is a social construct, and something that we have been trained to put far too much stock in. This is a problem especially relevant to Bucknell’s campus, where students are typically high-achievers, and often under pressure not only to succeed at an exceptionally high level academically, but to conform to a very specific set of conventions socially as well. I have spoken to so many people on this campus who struggle just to get through the day, be it due to depression, anxiety, or crushing stress, but who are terrified to seek counseling or even ask their friends for help because they believe that “normal” people do not deal with this sort of thing. They think that there is something wrong with them, and are determined to hide it from the rest of the world by donning a mask and pretending that everything is fine. *Next to Normal* speaks to this campus, shattering the stigma around mental illness that is still prevalent here. While writing this show, Tom Kitt says, “I learned to see [depression] in its true form, which is that it’s a disease. I think there’s a tendency...to say, ‘Why can’t that person snap out of it? Why are they acting that way?’ Brian has that great line when the doctor says it’s a disease like hypertension or diabetes and it must be treated” (Reesman 15). That is a message that I know students at Bucknell need to hear.

As Anthony Rapp writes in the foreword to the published copy of *Next to Normal*’s script, “When writing musicals...it’s easy to be clever, it’s easy to be corny, it’s easy to take the easy way out. It takes guts to get to the heart of the matter, to not flinch away from the painful truths and heartbreaks that we all live through. It takes guts to write about love and life and death and grief and joy” (Kitt and Yorkey 16). *Next to Normal* is a beautifully written, powerful look into a family dealing with mental illness, and a show that is vital for the Bucknell community at this time.

Direction

I am incredibly passionate about musical theatre, both as a performer and as a director, and plan on pursuing a career in this field upon graduating. Having the chance to direct *Next to Normal* as a 319 project would allow me the chance to improve as a music director, a rare opportunity here. I have worked as a music director at a community theatre, and have been music directing my a cappella group here since my sophomore year, and it is a career path that I am very interested in.

What excites me about *Next to Normal* is how the music follows the content of the show: as Tom Kitt puts it, “For me, the story always drove the music...For the pharmacologist number, for example, I remember the day we hit on the jazz waltz. I wanted to desensitize the drugs, almost make it feel like it’s in radio jingle land because I think there is a sense, especially on television...that they do try to desensitize a little bit what they’re selling. So musically it seemed to me that that wistful, spring-in-your-step type music worked well for that, as opposed to saying, ‘This needs to be jazzier.’” (Reesman 14). The music is such an integral part of the show that a crossover between directing and music directing feels natural.

Some Thoughts on Design, Production, and Budget

A musical is, above all, a collaborative process. I would be extremely excited to work with members of both the Department of Theatre and Dance and the Music Department in this endeavor, students as well as faculty. For example, Dustyn and I recently discussed the possibility of collaborating on this project, which is something that I would be thrilled about.

Next to Normal is an intimate show in terms of size, with a cast of six (4M, 2F). This is perfect, as it will allow me to spend time working in-depth with every actor and to focus on character development through song in a manageable setting.

While *Next to Normal* is not a dance-heavy show, there are a few numbers that I would like to coordinate movement into, such as *My Psychopharmacologist and I*, which sets lyrics “Without a little lift/The ballerina falls” to a jazzy waltz. Therefore, I am interested in working with a movement specialist to develop choreography for these movements. I have approached Genna Hartnett, a student choreographer in the dance program who is also passionate about theatre, with this idea. I know Genna well, and trust her with this not only because I have seen the high level of work she holds herself to, but because of her commitment to storytelling in her choreography. She views dancing as an emotional tool to share a story, which is exactly what I would ask for from a choreographer. In the time since I first approached her, she has listened to the soundtrack and has already started sending me her thoughts.

I understand that I am asking a lot of my design team, especially my sound designer, in requesting their assistance on this project. I am willing to make any adjustments needed to avoid unnecessary technical complications, and to assist them in any way possible.

I know that musicals tend to be more expensive than straight plays, in terms of obtaining the rights and handling the added element of music. However, I would compensate for that in other areas of the budget. My focus in undertaking this project is on acting through song, and so I am asking for very little in terms of set and costuming. A simple, pared-down set would highlight my actors and would not detract from the production in any way. And since this is a contemporary play, much of the costuming would come straight out of the actors' closets. In terms of a pit, standard orchestration calls for guitar, bass, violin, cello, piano, and drums. I am more than willing to consider other options, however, including a pared-down pit or even canned music as an alternative.

Next to Normal is licensed by Music Theatre International (MTI), the link to which can be found here: <http://mtishows.com/next-to-normal>

Timeline

Ideally, I would hold auditions during the fall semester, in order to begin music rehearsals, which I would run and accompany, before winter break. By doing this, I want to ensure that the cast is comfortable with the music when starting to block and stage the show come spring semester during the official rehearsal period.

During staging rehearsals, I would like to make use of MTI's resource, RehearScore (<http://mtishows.com/marketplace/resource/pre-performance/rehearscorerplus>). The program is "A complete digital rendition of the Piano-Conductor Score sequenced by a top Broadway pianist precisely the way the composer intended. Every musical number (including scene changes, dance music and underscoring) is recorded in its entirety..." I have used this program before in high school, when my director acted as music director as well. It is invaluable. Every cast member receives a copy of the program, which has all vocal lines recorded and which allows them to isolate their specific lines in songs, so that they can rehearse on their own and over winter break. It allows us to add cuts and vamps, and change tempo within songs.

Coursework

RESC 098 (Discovery of the Expressive Self)
 THEA 102 (Theatrical Rehearsal and Performance)
 THEA 145 (Bucknell Backstage)
 THEA 207 (Musical Theatre)
 THEA 220 (Acting II)
 THEA 240 (Directing the Play)
 THEA 256 (Rituals, Festivals, and Institutions)
 THEA 258 (Modernism in Performance)
 THEA 260 (Theatre and Revolution)

THEA 265 (Shakespeare in Performance)

THEA 261 (Inner Journey: Sam Shepard and American Theatre)

DANC 105 (Jazz Dance Technique I)

Production History

Directing

Fall 2015 - '*Identity Crisis* and *The Actor's Nightmare* by Christopher Durang

Fall 2014 - *Daniel on a Thursday* by Garth Wingfield (Cocktails)

Performing

Spring Awakening (Wendla)

Tartuffe (Flipote)

The Mystery of Edwin Drood (Beatrice/Miss Florence Gill)

Scripted (Elaine - Cocktails 2013)

All the Great Books (Abridged)

Playwriting/Composing

The Knowledge Project

Assistant Stage Managing

Fall Dance Concert 2015

Fall Dance Showcase 2013

Sources Consulted

Cohen, Patricia. "Mental Illness, the Musical, Aims for Truth." *The New York Times*. 16 April 2009.

Reesman, Bryan. "The Many Styles of *Normal*." *Stage Directions*. 28 September 2009.

Yorkey, Brian and Tom Kitt. *Next to Normal*. Theatre Communications Group. 20 July 2010.

319 Production Proposal Supplement – March 2016

After further discussion with Dustyn and Gary since the submission of my 319 proposal, I thought it best to include this supplemental information for the department's consideration. Thank you very much in advance for reading!

Additional Thoughts on Design, Production, and Budget

I have come to realize, given the limited rehearsal period for this production, that it is in the best interest of the show to split the duties of stage director and music director. Dustyn has very generously agreed to take on the responsibilities of stage director, so that I can focus primarily on the music director of this piece. I am thrilled about this collaboration, and look forward to working with and learning from Dustyn throughout this process.

Furthermore, my advisors and I have looked closely into the budget for this production, and I have some preliminary budget projections:

- ☐ I have used Music Theatre International's (MTI) budget calculator to roughly determine the cost of licensing *Next to Normal* from them. Assuming that this show takes place in Tustin with four performances for a 120-seat house, the projected cost of royalties, rentals, and the security deposit comes to around \$896-\$1213.
- ☐ I have also looked into my options for providing music for the show.
 - ☐ One option is using a pit, to provide live music for the show. Based on consultation with *Spring Awakening*'s music director, Paul Helm, my ideal pit size would be six musicians, which would cost \$3000 total. However, Paul noted that the pit could be pared down to just three musicians if necessary (covering piano, cello, and percussion), for a total cost of \$1500.
 - ☐ Another option available to me is using canned music. I have experience with this, having music directed and performed at a community theatre that used pre-recorded tracks in place of a live orchestra. That theatre used a company called "Custom Broadway MIDI," which prepared professional-quality tracks for not only the songs, but also the underscoring and scene changes, and worked with us to make any adjustments to key or tempo that we requested. I reached out to Custom Broadway MIDI this past week, and they have informed me that the total cost of this service, which includes the use of their tracks for all rehearsals and performances, is \$1200.

Finally, I have given more thought to the sound design of this show. Previously, I had been concerned about how to incorporate the use of microphones in the Tustin black box. However, I realized that while working at the community theatre I mentioned above, which is comparable in

size to Tustin, we never once used microphones in our performances. Due to the small size of the theatre, all of the performers' voices carried perfectly to the audience without need for further amplification. Using canned music for the performances would actually be a benefit here, as we would be able to ensure that our music did not overpower our performers.

Appendix 2

Next to Normal Audition and Callback Journal

Audition and Callback Journal

Monday, October 3, 6-8 pm – Tustin Acting Studio

Audition structure

- Auditionees were instructed beforehand to prepare a 32 bar cut of a song from a pop-rock musical
 - I also gave them a list of potential musicals to choose songs from, in order to give them an idea of the type of music I was looking to hear
 - The songs on this list were written in a style similar to the music from *Next to Normal*, which would allow me to get an idea of how each actor would sound performing in our show
- Auditionees signed up in advance for five minute slots of time, in which they would perform their brief song selection while I accompanied them on the piano

Audition notes

- As music director, I focused both on the quality of voice of the actor and on their interpretation of the song
 - I looked to see if the actor was merely singing the piece, or if they were using it as a vehicle to express a character
- After the actor performed their piece once, I gave them adjustments and asked them to sing their piece again
 - A frequent adjustment I gave was instructing the actor to consider their character's objective in the song: what did their character want? How were they planning on achieving it through this song?
 - I also asked the actor to do something known as "raising the stakes," which heightens the drama and action of a scene by making it more urgent for the character to achieve an objective or overcome an obstacle in a scene.
 - I gave adjustments during the auditions for two reasons: first of all, I wanted to see how readily an actor would take direction. If they committed entirely to my adjustments, even if they did not necessarily give the interpretation I was looking for, I was far more likely to recommend them for a callback because they took direction and made strong choices with their character. Second, I wanted to give all of the actors the experience of working with acting through song, an area of theatre to which many students at Bucknell are not often exposed.
- A common theme I noticed among today's auditions is that many students are unsure of how to work with an accompanist during an audition.

- Although I had instructed them to bring their sheet music in a binder, several forgot to bring sheet music entirely, while other simply handed it to me loose, which makes it very difficult to turn pages.
- Other students did not know how to give their song tempo, or how to mark their cuts.
- This is something I will keep in mind if I music direct in an academic setting again.
 - Running a workshop on how to work with an accompanist could be extremely beneficial to students.

After auditions ended for the evening, Dustyn and I created a callback list of actors that we were considering casting.

- We first determined who we were interested in seeing for each role.
- We had previously determined what songs and scenes we wanted to see for each character, so our next task was figuring out which actors would read together for each scene.
 - Determining pairings was the most time-consuming part of this task.
- Finally, we wrote up the list.
 - Each actor was informed of what characters they had been called back for, and what songs and scenes they would have to prepare.
 - They were also told to pick up sheet music and the scenes from the green room of Harvey Powers, in order to rehearse before their callbacks.

Tuesday, October 4, 5-10pm – Coleman Hall Classroom

Callback structure

- Singing and acting callbacks were integrated, and structure similarly for each character
 - For example, every actress called back for the role of Natalie would enter the room together.
- I ran through each song they were to have rehearsed beforehand to see if they had any questions before we began. I also had them sing through the songs together as a group.
 - Next, they sang each song cut one by one. I made notes, but did not give adjustments this time through.
 - Afterwards, they read through their audition scene
 - Their scene involved the character of Henry, so the actors auditioning for the role of Henry read with the different actresses auditioning for Natalie as part of their own auditions as well.
 - We used this structure for the other character roles as well.

Callback notes

- As the music director, I understood that the actors had had to learn these audition songs in a very short period of time. In an actual rehearsal period, they would have almost two months in which to learn their music with me. Therefore, I was less concerned with how

accurately they nailed their rhythms and more concerned with how they interpreted the music as their characters, and the style in which they sang the music.

- For example, one actress who auditioned sang the music beautifully, but her character choices were not strong, which made it difficult to envision her as the role.
- On the other hand, a different actor accidentally sang the wrong lyric in his callback strong, but created a compelling character while singing, which drew me in and allowed me to see what he would bring to the role.

After callbacks, Dustyn, our movement specialist Genna Hartnett, our stage manager Lauren Scott, and myself made casting decisions.

- This was challenging, as so many of the people we called back delivered strong auditions.
- We looked not only at the actor as an individual, but also how they would work paired with other actors in their roles.
 - This is crucial to examine, because different actors have very different chemistry when paired together
 - Age was also a factor: the actress playing the daughter could not read as older than the actress playing the mother
- After much debate, we came to an agreement on our cast list:
 - Mukta Phatak will play the role of Diana, the mother.
 - Midge Zuk will play the role of Natalie, the daughter.
 - Nick Talbot will play the role of Dan, the husband.
 - Brendan Trybus will play the role of Gabe, the son.
 - Kyle Cohick will play the role of Henry, Natalie's boyfriend.
 - Patrick Newhart will play the roles of Dr. Fine and Dr. Madden, Diana's therapists.

Appendix 3
Cast List

NEXT TO NORMAL
CAST LIST

DAN.....*Nick Talbot*
GABE.....*Brendan Trybus*
HENRY.....*Kyle Cohick*
DOCTOR.....*Patrick Newhart*
DIANA.....*Mukta Phatak*
NATALIE.....*Midge Zuk*

Appendix 4

Example of Fall Semester Design Meeting Notes

Notes Taken by Stage Manager Lauren Scott

N2N Design Meeting 10/17/16

- Address read through – Sunday we're back for rehearsal
 - Design presentation week after
- Next meeting – 10/24 (next Monday)
 - Last before next semester
 - What day do we want to do meetings next semester?
- Update from me: Goldie will let me know when to reserve music building for rehearsals before break and I will talk to Chris
- Review floor plan
 - Floor = Section 1; Down SL platform = 2; Up SL = 3; Up SR = 4
 - Delete block downstage from center stairs
 - SL platform height?
 - Bed, front porch, bench?
 - Front porch – exterior so not part of this structure?
 - Center tall block?
 - SL shorter block by stairs?
 - 2 large open spaces SR
 - One = storage; one = sittable
 - Center shelves – prop space
 - Audience
 - Same aisles as usual?
 - 2 on end, 1 in middle?
- Scene to scene
 - Things we need in each scene
 - In a house pg. 1-8 – by location?
 - How do we want to break up the script into scenes?
 - Keyboard as practical? Yes?
 - Who's crazy
 - Doctor's office on base floor (1) isolated between front tall pillar and (2)
 - Where's Dan's home?

Appendix 5

Song Breakdown by Character

Song Breakdown By Character							
ACT I	Diana	Dan	Gabe	Natalie	Henry	Doctor Madden	
Just Another Day							6
Everything Else							1
Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I							6
Perfect For You							2
I Miss the Mountains							1
It's Gonna Be Good							6
He's Not Here							1
You Don't Know							1
I Am The One							2
Superboy And The Invisible Girl							3
Doctor Rock							1
I'm Alive							1
Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I'm Failing							6
I Dreamed A Dance							1
There's A World							1
I've Been							2
Didn't I See This Movie?							1
A Light In The Dark							2
ACT II							
Wish I Were Here							6
Song of Forgetting							3
Hey #1							2
Seconds And Years							3
Better Than Before							4
Aftershocks							1
Hey #2							2
You Don't Know (Reprise)							2
Music Box							1
How Could I Ever Forget?							2
It's Gonna Be Good (Reprise)							2
Why Stay?							2
A Promise							2
I'm Alive (Reprise)							1
The Break							1
Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me (Reprise)							3
Maybe (Next To Normal)							2
Hey #3/Perfect For You (Reprise)							2
So Anyway							1
I Am The One (Reprise)							2
Finale: Light							6

Appendix 6

Example of Production Meeting Minutes

Notes Taken by Stage Manager Lauren Scott

Next to Normal Production Meeting 1/27/17

- Designer run: now Monday the 6th
- Tech week schedule
 - Begin dry tech Friday 1-5pm
 - Preview wed, opening thurs?
 - Official opening Friday as usual
 - Difficult to have costumes/things ready earlier than planned
 - Thursday = preview, possible charge, discounted
 - Food bank night? Heath
 - Wednesday = possible arts college invite
- Box office for merit weekend
 - Make sure admissions doesn't give all arts merit (dance, writing, etc) tix
 - 9 theatre kids – only offer to them? Tickets? Vouchers? Find out if def coming
 - Contact people ahead of time
 - Anything we can do for women's community? Tix or donations?
 - New women's resource director
 - If women's resource person can come to show and collect all money that's fine
- Applause?
 - Think about during design run
 - Make transitions for lights?
 - People's thoughts?
 - Actor vamping?
- If anyone wants individual meetings with Dustyn – Thursday or Friday otherwise skype
- Lights
 - Don't need drastic, scene change lights; lots of fades/morphing
- Props
 - Pills=tic tacs
 - Natalie hide pills in tic tac container
 - Sandwiches – how?
 - Hospital bed
 - What scenes? End of act 1?
 - Beginning of act 2
 - Wheeled by how many people?
 - Cot sized – what does it look like? Gurney?
 - Can put diana in chair in doctor office for 1st act instead?
- Thoughts from Dustyn
 - This is a “rock musical.”
 - This is story about a family.
 - This is a story about individuals who often fail themselves and each other.
 - This is a story about mental illness, PTSD, grief, fear, coping, and forgiveness
 - This is a story about hope, about shedding light in the darkness, about the process of rebuilding.

Appendix 7

Example of Rehearsal Report

Taken by Stage Manager Lauren Scott

Next To Normal
REHEARSAL REPORT
 1/27/17

Stage Manager: Lauren Scott

Assistant Stage Managers: Emma Miller, Caitlin Kalsbeek, Franz Schauer

Call Began: 6:32pm Breaks: (See Below) Ended: 10:32pm

Late: Absent:

Rehearsal Breakdown		
Time	What	Who
6:32-7:30	Pg 50-52	Mukta, Nick
7:30-7:36	Vocal warmups	ALL
7:36-9:00	Review Pg 44-52	ALL except Kyle
7:40-8:00	Vocal work	Kyle
9:00-9:12	Scene work	Nick
9:00-10:06	Gonna Be Good movement	ALL except Mukta
9:12-9:35	Character work	Mukta
9:35-10:07	Character work	Mukta, Midge
10:07-10:32	Character work	Mukta, Midge, Nick

General:
Movement:
Orchestra:
Sound:
Set:
Props:
-bag for <u>diana's</u> stuff that she'd have clothes and such in for while she's at hospital
-another folder (<u>dr madden</u>)
-bandages for Diana's hands/wrists
Costumes:
Makeup/Hair:
Lights:

Appendix 8

Rehearsal Journal

Monday, November 28, 5-7pm – Weis Music Building

All six actors were called today.

- I purposely chose to begin rehearsals with our large group numbers
 - This way, I could set a precedent for how rehearsals would be run while I had them all together
 - Additionally, I wanted them to begin bonding as a cast immediately
 - This is a difficult and taxing show, and my actors will have to rely on each other for support throughout this long process
- I began with a “welcome” speech that set cast expectations going forward
 - All actors would work on their music outside of rehearsal as well as during, by recording our sessions and using them to rehearse on their own
 - They would respect each other as artists and people, and remain focused during rehearsals
 - They would not make jokes about their fellow actors’ artistic processes, and would treat each other professionally in rehearsal, regardless of their relationship outside of the show
 - Furthermore, they would be sensitive to the fact that certain themes in this show (depression, bipolar disorder, and attempted suicide), may hit closer to home for some actors than others, and that they would therefore treat the show content with respect as well
 - Lastly, I reminded them that these next two weeks are specifically for learning the immense amount of music in *Next to Normal*, and that blocking and movement rehearsals, along with character work, will begin next semester

I then led a vocal warm-up.

- Many different things are at play while singing
 - The body should be physically aligned
 - I began by having the actors center themselves, balancing their weight so they were leaning on neither their heels nor toes, keeping their knees slightly bent, stacking their neck and head straight on top of their spine, and letting go of any tension in the body
 - Next, breath support is crucial
 - I led an exercise designed to allow breath to flow more easily when the actors sing, which makes their sound smoother and more even
 - This entails having them breathe in on a count of four, and then out on a “hissing” sound for a count of first twenty-five, then thirty
 - I will slowly begin to increase the count as they become more skilled at this exercise

- Finally, there are three different vocal registers that must be warmed up: head, mix, and chest voice
 - Head voice is the highest register, named because that is where the voice seems to resonate in the vocalist's body while singing in this register
 - It is associated with a more classical style of singing
 - While not used much in the music of *Next to Normal*, head voice encourages good technique, which benefits the vocalist overall and can actually strengthen the other vocal registers as well
 - Mix voice is a combination of head and chest, and it is what musical theatre most commonly utilizes.
 - It most resembles a “speaking voice,” and singing in mix can almost sound conversational at times
 - Chest voice is the lowest register, named because the sound seems to resonate in the chest of the vocalist while singing here
 - Belting, a style of singing popular in today's pop and rock music, as well as contemporary musical theatre, comes from chest voice
 - It is hard to use chest voice correctly; I personally have several friends who have damaged their voice from belting without knowledge of how to do so properly.
 - Since this kind of damage can be permanent or require expensive surgery, it is crucial for my actors to learn how to belt properly, as many of their characters, especially those played by Mukta, Midge, and Brendan, do a significant amount of belting in *Next to Normal*
- To warm up the different registers, I led a series of exercises known as “vocalises”
 - This refers to singing a passage on syllables rather than words
 - They can help increase vocal flexibility, allow the singer to focus on a specific register of their voice, or cultivate a specific tone in their singing
 - I used different vocalises for each register
 - For head voice, vocal “trills” and open vowels, such as “ooh” and “ah” make the singer open their soft palate, an area in the back of the mouth that needs space to produce the head voice sound
 - Mix voice benefits from ping-y syllables, such as “may,” which encourages forward resonance and placement in the facial mask
 - For chest voice, I largely use “nyah,” which makes the sound nasal in the vocalises, but which keeps the chest voice from becoming stuck in the throat, which is always a danger
 - To finish, I do a sliding exercise that requires the singer to slide from their chest voice, to their mix voice, to their head voice

- This is important because most musical theatre song utilize more than one vocal register
- My actors need to be able to switch from one to another with ease and agility

After warm-ups, we begin learning music.

- Overall, the goal for these two weeks is to learn notes, rhythms, and harmonies. Next semester, we will focus on interpretation and stylization of the music
- We started with the finale, “Light,” which features all six actors
 - While this song features the intricate and melodic harmonies that songwriting team Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey are known for, it is actually one of the more straightforward pieces in the show
 - There are no prominent key signature or time signature changes, and the melodies and chord progressions fit harmonically with each other
 - Therefore, I thought this song would be a good one to start with, in terms of boosting morale and getting the actors excited to dive into this project. I was proved right.
 - All of the actors picked up their music remarkably quickly. I was especially impressed by Mukta and Midge, who only needed to hear their lines once before holding down their harmonies
- Next, we moved to “Just Another Day,” which is the opening number of the show, and again features all six actors
 - This number proved more difficult to learn, because of the way certain lines of different characters interlock and play off each other
 - Brendan especially had some difficulty with the timing, but after several rounds of repetition he was able to grasp this tricky section
- I had hoped to cover “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” today as well, but we ran out of time. However, I built an hour of review into tomorrow’s rehearsal, so we will take the time instead to learn this third piece.

Overall, I am very pleased with how this first rehearsal went.

- All of the actors seem dedicated and motivated to work hard and practice on their own.
 - I was especially touched by Kyle. During his callback audition, I had worked with him on singing in a more contemporary style of voice, rather than the classical style that he was used to singing in. When he sang for me today, I could tell that he had already been working hard on his own to continue developing his contemporary style. This gave me an extra boost of confidence that he and his fellow actors would do everything in their power to make this production succeed.

Tuesday, November 29, 7-10pm – Weis Music Building

With all six actors called again, we began with warm-ups.

- My warm-up followed the same structure as yesterday: body, breath, and vocalises
 - However, I switched up some of the individual vocalises

- As we get further into the process, I will begin giving them vocalises specifically tailored towards fixing things I hear in their music when they sing
- They seem to enjoy and find helpful two vocalises in particular
 - One starts on a “hmm” sound, which focuses the voice and makes sure that the chords are vibrating properly, and then opens to a “mayo” (pronounced like the condiment abbreviation), which exercises the mix voice, and then proceeds to an “ooh,” which encourages flexibility between the mix and head.
 - The other exercise is the sliding one I introduced them to yesterday, which switches from head to mix to chest
 - Mukta mentioned that she has never worked on a vocalise that switches between registers, and that having the chance to work on this is extremely helpful

After warm-ups, we briefly ran through “Light” and “Just Another Day.”

- I wanted to make sure that none of their harmonies had slipped in the day since they first learned these two numbers.
 - It is necessary to review complicated pieces often until they slip into long-term memory
- Fortunately, the two pieces remained solid.
 - I only needed to review m. 86-89 from “Light,” and the final lines of “Just Another Day.”

Next, we used the hour I had initially set aside for review to learn “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.”

- This is an exciting song because it incorporates different characters’ themes from earlier songs into one larger number as many of the characters’ conflicts come to a head
- As we worked on this, I noticed that Pasek and Paul have a tendency to write men’s musical lines that stretch the limits of men’s ranges
 - Gabe’s line, especially, is vocally demanding: his character belts a number of A4 notes, which are a full step higher than the belting limits of most tenor ranges
 - While Brendan can hit an A4 with ease in a falsetto, we will either have to work incredibly hard to expand his range to belt an A4, modify the melody line slightly, which is something that music directors often have to do, or accept the falsetto tone
 - Most likely, I will use a mixture of these three strategies

At eight, we started working on “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist and I.”

- I can already tell that this is going to be one of the most challenging numbers in the show
- The rhythms are complicated and shifting, and the harmonies of the different characters often clash with each other
 - Dissonant harmonies are usually the hardest to master
 - The notes are often very close together, which makes it tempting to slide from your actual note to your partner’s note

- Dissonant harmonies often just sound “wrong.” A vocalist needs to be very confident in his or her line
- Furthermore, the lines imitate the jazz style of “scatting,” which is by nature improvisational. However, because four characters are singing the same “scatting” line, I need to make sure they all nail down their specific rhythms
 - Otherwise, the lines will sound messy
- Patrick was having difficulty with the “ba da da” round m. 248-254
 - This is a three-part round, where he, Natalie, and Brendan sing the same line one beat after each other
 - Patrick’s line starts on beat three, and he was having trouble hearing where to come in, and was struggling to stay on his rhythm, often jumping to Brendan’s line
 - I worked to solve this using a clapping and counting exercise, where I had Patrick clap and count beats with me until he got used to hearing where beat three fell in the pattern
 - While he is not consistent quite yet, he is improving in this section
 - Knowing Patrick, I have confidence that he will work dedicatedly outside of rehearsal to master this section before the next time we run this

To finish rehearsal, we learned “Wish I Were Here.”

- This rock anthem features my two women, Mukta and Midge (Diana and Natalie), and uses my men as backup singers
- It also features a constantly changing time signature, as well as the rare time signature of seven-eight
 - Seven-eight time is little used in musical theatre because it is difficult to count and hear. It is not intuitive
 - Six-eight and four-four, the time signatures that surround seven-eight, are both common signatures, and rhythmically easier to master
 - The trap of seven-eight is that many vocalists try to add or subtract an eighth beat from seven-eight to turn it into one of these more intuitive signatures
- As such, I worked first with the women doing clapping and counting exercises to master this time signature. We also spent time circling in their music every instance of a time signature change, so that they would be aware of it while singing
 - Fortunately, they are picking up the seven-eight rhythm rapidly
 - I am especially impressed with how quickly Mukta heard the beats, and how she was able to correct herself the first time she made a mistake
 - This is a good sign because it means she knows what it should sound like, and what she needs to correct
- The men are actually having more difficulty with this song. They have several tricky rhythms and harmonies to master, and are struggling to hold their parts down

- While we did not have enough time today to perfect every section, I can already tell this will be one of the numbers we spend a significant amount of time on with them next semester

Wednesday, November 30, 5-7pm – Weis Music Building

Nick, Midge, Brendan, and Mukta were called today.

- I wanted to focus on the family-centered numbers today, in which Patrick and Kyle do not sing

As usual, we began with warm-ups.

- I have already begun to notice an improvement in their breath work exercises: they can hold a twenty-five count hiss with ease now, and I have begun to challenge them with thirty-five count hisses

After this, we started working on all of the music that only involves these four actors.

- “He’s Not Here/You Don’t Know/I Am The One”
 - I will have to work with Mukta to rein in her voice during parts of this song
 - When she sings an emotional song, she tends to lose control over her voice in terms of volume and pure belting
 - While this will work for small sections of the song, if she sustains it she will exhaust her voice quickly
 - Additionally, an audience can generally sense a loss of control in performance; it will drag them out of the show and make them focus on the actor rather than the character
- “Song of Forgetting”
 - Nick, Midge, and Mukta picked up the gorgeous harmonies in this song extraordinarily quickly, which thrilled me
- “Superboy and the Invisible Girl”
 - This song, which features the characters of Natalie and Gabe is written extraordinarily high for the male voice
 - The actor who originated the role of Gabe on Broadway, Aaron Tveit, has an unusually high belting voice for a tenor
 - I assume that the song lines were written with his voice in mind, as the original cast in shows go through a work-shopping process in which songs are modified and change as they rehearse
 - I will work individually with Brendan next semester to increase his belting range. That failing, I will modify the notes of his lines
 - A falsetto will likely not work here, as it is the climax of the song and requires a belting sound, which Midge is delivering as Natalie
 - If Brendan used his falsetto, the blend of their voices would likely be off
- “I Am The One (Reprise)”

- This reprise, which brings back the melody and some of the lyrics from the earlier iteration of the song, is rather brief, and features only Nick and Brendan, who were able to breeze through it quickly
 - Since they had learned their notes and harmonies earlier, it was more a matter of reviewing the new words and slightly slower tempo
- This gave us time to review “He’s Not Here/You Don’t Know/I Am The One” before I dismissed Brendan and Midge to work solely with Nick and Mukta, who play husband and wife in the show

For the last half hour of rehearsal, I worked with Nick and Mukta on “A Light in the Dark” and “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise).”

- Since “A Light in the Dark” is a relatively straightforward number, we were able to focus mainly on the more challenging “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)”
 - This song features a harmony that consists solely of half-steps, the most dissonant harmony in the book
 - Due to the notes living so close to each and sounding, so to speak, so “crunchy,” it is difficult to maintain this harmony
 - It took a good deal of running this number to nail down the lines, and I am fairly certain we will have to run it many more times next semester

Thursday, December 1, 7-10pm – Weis Music Building

Today, Nick, Mukta, Midge, Patrick, and Brendan were called to start, as Kyle had a prior rehearsal conflict for the first two hours.

- This ended up working out perfectly, however, as there were several songs in the show that only involved these five, so we were able to work productively without wasting time.

We began again with vocal warm-ups.

- We focused today on the idea of vocal onset
 - Onset refers to the start of a note
 - A good onset is clean and effortless
 - Without training, however, an onset can sound breathy, glottal, or have a wind up to it, in which the singer almost begins the note in the back of their throat before they actually open their mouth to sing
- A good way to think about onset is to just imagine your vocal folds coming gently together to create the sound
- To practice, I had them work vocalises on a simple “ooh”
 - It was difficult for them, especially for Patrick, who kept trying to “wind up” to the sound
 - We will continue practicing this vocalise going forward

After warm-ups, I taught them “Seconds And Years,” “Better Than Before,” “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling (Reprise),” and “You Don’t Know (Reprise).”

- We were able to move through these pieces relatively quickly, especially as two of them were reprises, so the actors were already familiar with the melody

- One thing I have noticed is that Nick is struggling a bit with the rhythmic patterns of this contemporary rock music
 - Nick has largely performed in classical musicals, and he is not used to how many of the notes in this music fall on the off-beats of measures
 - I was able to work intensely with him today on this, and he acknowledged that he is struggling a bit with these rhythms, but knows what he has to work on
 - I had him start circling all the places in his music where he is shaky on the rhythms

Although it wasn't previously on the schedule, we had some extra time before Kyle came at nine, so we began learning "It's Gonna Be Good."

- Due to the rapid tempo of the song, as well as the intricate harmonies, the actors definitely struggled learning this one
 - There is one section ("G, O, O, D, good") in particular where the notes of the actors are so closely placed and so staccato that they barely have time to register if they are hitting the correct note before they move onto the next one
 - Therefore, we spent at least fifteen minutes working simply on this one line
- I'm glad that we were able to start work on this song today, because I can tell that we would not have been able to learn the entire piece in the original rehearsal time I had allotted

At nine, Kyle arrived and I dismissed everyone except for him and Nick, as planned.

- I taught them "A Promise," a duet that immediately follows as a response to Natalie and Diana's "Why Stay?"
 - Kyle is doing very well with his new style of contemporary singing. The only time I notice his classical training coming out is on his "ooh" vowels, which are too rounded to sound realistic, and occasionally on the consonant "r," which he softens. This would work in a choral setting, but as a solo voice sounds unnatural.
 - Luckily, Kyle picks up on when he is doing this and quickly corrects himself. Soon, he will not make these mistakes in the first place
- Next, I taught Kyle his part of "It's Gonna Be Good," to catch him up to the other actors
 - This went fairly quickly, because he is not yet practicing his harmonies against the other actors, and because I was able to focus solely on him during this time

Friday, December 2, 5-7pm – Weis Music Building

Today, only Midge, Henry, and Mukta were called, to focus on the duets between Natalie and Henry, and Natalie and Diana.

After our usual warm-up, we began with Natalie and Henry's "Perfect For You," and a trio of duets they sing labeled "Hey #1-3."

- The “Hey” numbers actually proved challenging for the actors to learn, because they are just similar enough in melody that when they do vary from each other, I kept having to drill the differences to make sure Midge and Kyle didn’t mistake one for the other

Next, we ran Natalie’s “Everything Else.”

- Midge had clearly already worked on this solo on her own, which I was pleased to find
- One thing I am excited to play with in this song is the idea of control
 - Natalie is an uptight, straight-A student who loves classical music because every note is exact. However, during the course of this song she struggles to maintain control of her emotions, which burst to the surface at the climax of the piece
 - I want to play with the rigidity of Natalie’s notes. At the start of the song, I want Midge to adhere to exactly what is written on the page. However, as her character starts to lose control, I am curious to see what would happen if I allowed Midge to become more loose with her rhythms to mirror this.

We finished with Natalie and Diana’s duets, “Why Stay?”, “Maybe (Next to Normal),” and with a review of “Wish I Were Here.”

- “Why Stay?” is a challenge for the same reason “Wish I Were Here” is: shifting time signatures and a recurrence of the seven-eight pattern, along with a fast tempo
 - Luckily, both Midge and Mukta are very musical, and were able to pick up the piece in spite of this
- “Maybe (Next to Normal)” is fortunately a straightforward number
 - Although Diana and Natalie sing to each other, they do not sing together here, so there were no harmonies to teach
- I was happy that Mukta requested to review “Wish I Were Here” as well, which I had not originally planned to review until Sunday
 - They are still having trouble getting into the seven-eight rhythm
 - They need to run it once with me counting the beats before they can do it themselves
 - This will be a matter of running it until they get this time signature into their bodies

Sunday, December 4, 2:30-6 – Weis Music Building

Patrick was called alone for the first half-hour of rehearsal today.

- We worked on his “Doctor Rock” riff, which is only three lines
- Riffing is by nature improvisational, so it was funny teaching Patrick a specific series of notes written for the riff. However, I am planning on letting him play around with it, so that he can make it his own for the show

I had scheduled everyone for the first hour and a half of rehearsal, blocking it off as “Review As Necessary.”

- This turned out to be an important block of time, because while we did use it to review “Light,” “Just Another Day,” “My Psychopharmacologist And I,” and “Wish I Were Here,” we also used the block of time to learn more of “It’s Gonna Be Good.”

- This is shaping up to be our most difficult song in the show
- The harmonies are not intuitive, and the actors are struggling to stay on pitch and in time
- Since the actors were solid on their notes and rhythms, I was able to dive more deeply into “Light”
 - During the piano section m. 86-89 (“Let it, let it...”), while the notes were there, the energy of the song was falling flat
 - This often happens during softer sections of high-energy or emotional pieces
 - Actors equate volume with energy, not realizing that more energy and control is required to sing softly
 - To remedy this, I had them do a “pulling” exercise that I learned from the Department of Music, and that I have used in my a cappella group many times
 - The actors stand with their feet wider apart than normal, and bend their knees to stand in a light squat
 - As they sing the lines, they imagine that the notes are flowing past them, like they are paddling down a river of notes
 - Every time they change notes, they use their arms and hands to “pull” the notes past them
 - Although part of this is a mental exercise for the actors, the quality of their sound instantly improved after they did this exercise
 - I asked them if they could hear the difference. They did, and made notes to use this exercise in the future if they felt their energy slipping again
- To finish the review, Nick and Brendan ran through “I’ve Been.”
 - Nick is starting to improve with his contemporary rhythms
 - They are still not intuitive to him, and he has to concentrate hard to get them down right now, but if he continues to drill over break he will soon get them into his body

After the review session, I dismissed everyone except for Nick and Mukta, to teach “How Could I Ever Forget,” and to review “A Light In The Dark” and “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise).”

- “How Could I Ever Forget” is a gentle piece that involves Diana and Dan’s lines playing off each other in rounds, and then meeting for delicate harmonies.
 - Many of the harmonies are in thirds, which are generally the most straightforward harmonies to learn
 - The only tricky section was in m. 60-62 (“The day that I lost you – it’s clear as the day we met.”), in which Nick has a double-flat harmony that he was having trouble landing. However, after drilling it a few times and clarifying that a

double-flat means that you sing the written note two half-steps down, he was able to pick it up.

- I was very pleasantly surprised to find that “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)” was still in good shape
 - I was expecting to have to review the challenging half-step harmonies, but Nick and Mukta had remained solid on them

Monday, December 5, 5-6pm – Weis Music Building

Brendan and Mukta were called today to learn Gabe and Diana’s solos and duets.

Brendan learned “I’m Alive,” “I’m Alive (Reprise),” “There’s A World,” “Aftershocks,” and “Music Box.”

- The biggest challenge for “I’m Alive” was that Brendan wants to sing exactly what Aaron Tveit did on the original cast recording of *Next to Normal*, which interferes at points both with what is written on the page and with his own artistic interpretation of the character.
 - I told him to stop listening to the cast album from now until the show closes
 - This will allow us to create our own interpretation of the pieces
- We will also work on the belted high notes at the end of “I’m Alive,” which are drawn out and repetitive and could strain Brendan’s vocal chords if not sung correctly
- I taught “There’s A World,” which Brendan had already partially learned for his callback, without incident. The same went for “Music Box,” which is just two lines of Gabe’s character humming a melody.
- “Aftershocks” is challenging because of the dramatic speed and tempo changes of the song, but the notes themselves are repetitive and easily within Brendan’s range, so we were still able to move through the piece with relative ease

Mukta and I then went over “I Miss The Mountains,” “I Dreamed A Dance,” “Didn’t I See This Movie?,” “The Break,” and “So Anyway.”

- Mukta had already learned a good portion of “I Miss The Mountains” for her callback, so we were able to run through it without incident
- “The Break” is challenging simply because of the speed with which Mukta must say her lines
 - She was tripping over her words trying to get through the lines
 - This is something that memorization will solve

Overall, I am pleased with how the past week has gone. We were able to cover a vast amount of material in a very short time (The only piece we were unable to finish was “It’s Gonna Be Good.”).

One thing I have noticed is that there are some discrepancies between my piano-conductor score and the scores of the actors. Throughout the week, I would occasionally be teaching a harmony when one of the actors would say, “That’s not what we have written here.” I would then compare the two copies and pick the harmony that I preferred, either fixing it

in my score or writing it into theirs. While a little frustrating, it has not truly impeded the process so far.

Sunday, January 15, 12-7:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today was our first day working with the full cast, stage management team, and stage director, Dustyn.

- It was also our first day in the space that we will eventually perform in, the Tustin black box
- Our set is already marked out in tape on the ground, so that the actors and directors can begin to visualize the space in which they will be working

Since we would begin with a read- and sing-through of the entire show, I began rehearsal with a vocal warm-up.

- Today, instead of having them center down as I usually do, balancing themselves and making sure their bodies are aligned before they begin to sing, I had them walk around the room at different paces and explore their bodies as they walked
 - I took an excellent workshop with a musical theatre professor over winter break, and as he pointed out, musical theatre actors are never simply standing still in perfect posture when they sing. They are dancing, or sitting, or interacting with the set and other actors. Therefore, actors need to train their bodies to sing with strong technique when in these situations.
- I started them with a pinched lip trill as usual, to get their vocal resonance flowing
- Following that, we went through a series of vocalises focused primarily on mix and belt, and the transition between the two, as those are the registers most required for *Next to Normal*
 - I used the syllables “nyah” and “why,” which forces the sound into the buzzy nasal cavity and out of the throat
 - I also used the vocalise that transitions from chest, to mix, to head, on a “may,” that the actors found helpful during our fall semester music rehearsals

After warming up, the read-through commenced.

- The fascinating thing about *Next to Normal* is that the plot is dominated by and propelled by the songs in the show. Unlike in many shows, where action and plot are halted for a musical number, the songs *are* the action
 - They are fully integrated into the show
 - Even when there are spoken lines, they are often contained within the music of the show
- I was nervous that the cast would forget a significant portion of the music over break, but for the most part, they retained their music, which was a relief
 - I could tell especially that Brendan and Patrick had been practicing

- Patrick successfully and confidently sang the part of “My Psychopharmacologist And I” that he had been struggling with previously – the “Use may be fatal” round
 - Brendan overall was stronger on his harmonies as well
- Kyle is still fighting his classic sound for Henry’s contemporary pieces
- Areas that need work
 - The area of “Just Another Day” beginning with Diana’s “It only hurts...” at m. 158
 - Mukta is having trouble hearing her entrance, and is jumping in a half-beat too early
 - The harmonies in general also need some refreshing
 - “It’s Gonna Be Good” needs help in general, as we did not finish learning it last semester, and the incredibly fast tempo of this song makes it difficult for the actors to catch their mistakes
 - The multiple lines of “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” m. 103-120
 - Nick especially struggled with his harmonies and rhythms here
 - Overall, I was a little concerned with Nick in today’s sing-through. As a jazz singer, I believe that he is used to being able to play with rhythms and melodies of the pieces he sings. However, I need to drill these pieces into him, because there is not as much freedom to rewrite the melodies and music of musical theatre. He was taking a lot of liberties today.
 - “How Could I Ever Forget?” and “A Light In The Dark” especially need work
- Today was also the first time I played through the entire show in one sitting. It was a little terrifying, but fortunately we got through with no major blunders.

Following the read-through, we took a short break, then came back to do table work, where we discussed expectations, our ideas for the show, and character and theme exploration.

- In terms of expectations, I made it clear that they need to be singing every day for at least an hour outside of rehearsal, including warming themselves up and practicing technique.
 - This is the only way to strengthen their voices
 - Otherwise, they will not be able to sustain their voices for the vocally demanding run of this show
 - I did this during the run of *Spring Awakening*, and my voice had strengthened immensely by performance weekend
- Ideas that stuck out to me from Dustyn’s discussion and presentation
 - This is a story about individuals who often fail themselves and each other
 - But this is also a story about hope and forgiveness
 - I am excited to explore the musical arc of each character
 - For example, Dan’s songs go from structured to a collapse

- Diana's songs mirror her highs and lows
- Does Henry represent stability because he is the only character with a "theme," so to speak?

- The notion of what is kept inside versus what is shown outside

After table work, we took our dinner break, then came back for ensemble building and character exploration, led by Dustyn.

- Dustyn encouraged everyone to lean into their impulses, and to release tension by doing so
- The actors walked through the space as their characters, exploring their impulses
 - I noticed that Midge instinctively stuck to straight lines of movement. She was drawn to lines that already existed on the floor. This fits Natalie.
 - Mukta swirled around the space in great sweeping patterns, reminiscent of Diana.
- The actors are already working together extraordinarily well. There is a strong level of trust there. I cannot wait to see this continued collaboration going forward.

Monday, January 16, 10-4:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began with movement to music.

- The actors moved through the space first as themselves, then as their characters, as I played different classical pieces on the piano
 - They had to follow the music, and let it influence them
- While I played, they also created still tableaux as their characters
 - Finding moments of stillness is crucial for this rock-based, frenetic show
- This transitioned into verb work. Dustyn would give me a verb, such as "to uncover," "to bury," "to assemble," and I improvised on that on the piano. In turn, the actors let my music influence their actions and movement
 - Through this, we explored relationships and the roles of the characters
 - What are some archetypes we could work with?
 - This was fascinating because just as the actors were discovering new sides of these verbs through movement, I was discovering the same through my playing
 - For example, for the verb "to bury," I began my improvisation in a dark, minor key, because the verb felt secretive. However, I soon found myself transitioning into a bright major key.
 - When I explored this impulse, I realized that when we bury something, we often mask it beneath a positive, bright exterior.
 - This clarified to me why Dan's song "It's Gonna Be Good" is in a chipper, major key, reminiscent of a television sitcom jingle. He is burying his fears below the surface and forcing himself to be cheerful.

In the afternoon, I led an exploration of acting the song, working with each actor one-on-one.

- I gave each actor a portion of one of their songs to work with

- Midge – “Superboy And The Invisible Girl”
- Mukta – “I Miss The Mountains”
- Nick – “I Am The One”
- Brendan – “I’m Alive”
- Kyle – “Perfect For You”
- Patrick – “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling (Reprise)”
- I then followed this format for each actor
 - I asked them what their song was about, and why they were singing it
 - I was looking for playable, specific objectives here, rather than broad, overarching emotions that are difficult to act upon
 - Next, they spoke their song as a monologue
 - This jolts them out of getting caught in the music and rhyme scheme of the piece, and into thinking about actually creating character and acting through the music
 - After this, they sang their song while I played the accompaniment on the piano
 - Following this, I dove into getting them thinking about why the music of their song is the way it is
 - For example, if there is an abrupt change in the chord progression, what might that be saying about what is happening in the scene?
 - It could signify an external event, or a change in tactics to achieve the character’s objective
 - Or, why is a particular word of a song a held note, while others are short and quick?
 - How does the time signature of the piece affect the acting of it?
 - Once I got them thinking about this, we ran through the song again
- The four actors we got to today before time ran out found this exercise extremely helpful, as the acting of a song is not something we necessarily think about that often
- We made some major breakthroughs and discoveries today
 - Midge found a more specific objective for herself
 - Before, she was playing the objective that she wanted more attention from her family, and that she wished her brother had never been born. This was too broad to be able to act upon in her specific song.
 - We narrowed this into her wanting an apology from her mother in that moment.
 - We also played with varying the different registers of her voice
 - She had been belting the whole song, and I encouraged her to incorporate mix to add texture and depth
 - The challenge I gave Nick was to find a different reason for each time he says the phrase “I am the one.” It is so repetitive that there is a reason the composers created the song this way.

- The trap of Mukta's "I Miss The Mountains" is that the actress can easily fall into playing self-pity, which is not a strong choice for an audience to watch. Instead, we worked with her finding joy in her words, which actually achieved the objective of making it more heart-breaking for us.
- For Brendan, we worked with the objective that he is fighting to be remembered, and that a song that starts out as a seduction transitions to aggressive desperation as the music changes in the chorus.
- We still have a long way to go in terms of these songs, but today was a very solid start to exploring character through them.

Tuesday, January 17, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began with vocal warm-ups.

- I focused today on creating an open, released sound, which is harder to accomplish than it sounds
 - Singers, especially MT singers, tend to push when they sing higher notes, to generate the maximum amount of volume possible
 - This can sound forced and unpleasant to a listener, and could potentially damage the voice if sustained for a long period of time
 - Instead, I had them sing an "ooh" vocalise while biting down on their finger
 - The closed space in the front of the mouth actually opens a backspace in the soft palate, creating a rounder, easier sound

After warming up, we reviewed and work-shopped "Just Another Day."

- I was grateful that for the most part they remembered all of their melodies and harmonies, because it allowed me to go in-depth into shaping the song
- General notes for all the actors
 - Growing notes
 - Whenever a note is held for more than a quarter beat, the actor should either crescendo or decrescendo into it
 - A sustained flat note is boring to listen to, while a growing note captures the audience's attention
 - Having listened to many cast recordings of different shows, this is something most professionals do
 - Diction and consonant placement
 - I had them over-enunciate phrases such as "It's just another day," which happen very quickly. If the consonants are not bitten, the audience will miss what was said.
 - We also practiced placing the final s on "It hurts" so that everyone was landing in the same spot
 - Even phrasing

- Some of the verses were getting choppy, with the lines sounding like individual words instead of phrases
 - They spoke the sentences to me, and then sang them with the cadence that they spoke them, which helped
 - What lines are important?
 - We spoke briefly about which lines for each character are crucial to that character, and should be brought out, so that everything is not at a maximum volume
 - Never sing using more than seventy percent of your voice
 - This is the opening number. If they come in full-force now, they will have nowhere to go
- Individual notes
 - Mukta
 - We fixed a few wrong notes at the beginning
 - Otherwise, she is taking notes well and immediately incorporating them into her singing, such as phrasing and growing notes
 - Midge
 - Midge has a tendency to want to belt all the time, so I pulled her back and used her mix voice, which is perfect for the opening number
 - Since she and I have worked with growing notes before, she was very helpful in demonstrating this technique to the other actors
 - We also found places for her to decrescendo in her lines
 - Nick
 - Nick also wanted to sing full-force on lines that were not as meaningful to his character
 - Once we toned down his volume, he blended significantly better with Brendan and Mukta
 - He is not quite grasping the concept of growing notes. I will work with him individually going forward
 - Brendan
 - Brendan's voice was rough today. He cracked a few times
 - However, I did work on his belted G
 - He has a tendency to strain his head forward when he belts high, which actually tenses his throat muscles and stops the sound
 - I had him push the back of his head into my hand, and to think of the sound rolling back and bouncing off the top of his head
 - At the same time, I had him squat to engage his lower abdominals, and to attempt to lift the piano, which does the same
 - After a few tries, the G came out much more solidly. He just needs to keep practicing this going forward

- Additionally, we fixed a harmony on “‘cause what doesn’t kill me doesn’t kill me, so fill me up for just another day,” m. 127-132.

Wednesday, January 18, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After beginning with our usual warm-up, we reviewed “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I.”

- Nick wants to lag on “And I was a wild twenty-five/And I loved a wife so alive...” at m. 35-42
 - He is having trouble feeling the contemporary off-beats of this section
- Additionally, I worked with Nick on acting his vocal lines more than singing them
 - Since Nick’s background is in classical musical theatre, he is not used to this integrated style of singing
- Patrick is still struggling to hear his “ba da da” line at m. 248-254
 - He wants to jump onto Brendan’s line
 - We went back to clapping and counting it out, and he eventually picked it up again
- Scatting lines need to be more phrased
- The biggest difficulty was a rhythm and counting error on the line “Anxiousness, anger, exhaustion, insomnia, irritability, nausea, vomiting,” m. 154-157
 - The actors were feeling this in triplets, because of the three four time signature of the piece, and were therefore speeding through the song and finishing their lines too early
 - This section is actually in a simple “one and two and three and” pattern
 - This was an extreme challenge to correct, because the triplet pattern was already ingrained in their brains
 - Eventually, I had to clap it out for them in slow motion to begin to get them on the right track
- On a positive note, I love what Mukta is doing with her voice for this song. She has really taken the “growing notes” note to heart. She also has a lilting quality to her voice for this that works well for this song.

We then moved onto working “Everything Else,” Natalie’s solo, with Midge.

- Why Mozart?
 - When playing Mozart, his musical lines are fascinating and complicated, but there is no room for improvisation
 - Unlike a romantic composer, like Chopin, Mozart is rigid in that you must play what is on the page. You cannot take liberties with the tempo or with your expression of the piece
 - It controls you. Natalie likes this
- There is a music shift at m. 33, “And you play ‘til it’s perfect...” though m. 48 from a classical Mozart style into a more contemporary pulsing beat

- This deviation signifies Natalie's loss of control, a break from her strict routine
- It is almost like a drug for her, a fix
- Natalie is trying to fit an identity that's not her
- Midge needs to be careful to not "sing the accompaniment," so to speak
 - The accompaniment is percussive so she doesn't have to be

Thursday, January 19, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After our usual warm-up, I worked with Kyle and Midge on "Perfect For You."

- Kyle has made fantastic progress
 - His major challenge has been overcoming his classical training and learning to sing in a contemporary style
 - Before we began working, he sang in a choral tone, which does not match the music of *Next to Normal*
- We had a huge breakthrough today when he was able to sing all of "Perfect For You" in a style that matched his speaking voice
 - What worked
 - Speaking the line, then singing it using similar inflections to when it was spoken
 - Emphasizing the hard "r" sound of words like "perfect"
 - Singing lines on a "nyah" syllable to bring his "ooh" vowel into a more forward placement
 - Getting him out of his own head by having him run around the room while singing

Next, I worked with Nick on "I've Been."

- A big challenge for Nick as well is that his background is in classic musical theatre and jazz, which are drastically different from contemporary musical theatre
 - I worked with him on speak-singing to find a more contemporary sound, and using straight tone instead of just vibrato
- We discussed where changes in the music occur, and why those happen
 - For example, why is the very end of the song ("I've never been alone") written with a drastically different melody from the rest of it?
 - Why is the middle portion of the song with the riffing so lifted melodically?
 - Could have to do with escapism, especially when Gabe enters.
 - What does Gabe represent?
- I also worked with Nick to break his speech patterns and get him into Dan's objectives throughout the song
 - He read his lines as a monologue
 - We also did a variation of a Meisner repetition technique, in which he said a line, I repeated it back to him, and we kept doing this until he found different nuances in the line. Then we moved to the next line.

- I then had him sing the song to me and convince me of Dan's point of view through it.

Friday, January 20, 3-4pm – Weis Music Building

Kyle requested a one-on-one session to work on his pieces more individually.

- We focused on “Hey #3/Perfect For You (Reprise)” and worked the contrast between when he speak-sings and when he can actually sing
 - The beginning is very “talk-y,” and requires more of a spoken tone than a pure vocal sound
 - It is only when he gets to the “perfect for you” refrain that he can start singing in earnest
- To bring Kyle's falsetto into a place of more forward resonance, I had him flip over and sing upside down, which puts the resonance in his facial mask
 - This worked very well. His challenge this week will be to replicate the sound while standing up
- Another challenge for Kyle is to relax his facial muscles
 - He tends to clench his jaw when he sings, which is unnecessary for the tone
 - We practiced releasing tension today
 - Additionally, I had him focus on keeping his eyes fully open while he sings, as he tends to want to close them halfway out of habit

Friday, January 20, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

I started with Brendan and Mukta today.

- Since I knew I would be working individually today with Brendan, whose songs are very high for the male voice, I concentrated on warming up the upper ranges of his voice
- I used the technique of flipping over and singing on a nasally vocalise
 - To Brendan's great surprise, he was able to hit a C, which is several notes higher than he can usually hit
 - This shows to me that when he sings normally, he holds a lot of tension in his throat, which restricts the sound

Next, Brendan and I worked “I'm Alive.”

- The difficulty of this song is that it requires sustained belting in the upper ranges of the tenor voice, which could put a lot of strain on Brendan's vocal chords
- I had him greatly pull back during the opening portions of the song, as he does not need to exhaust his voice in the beginning lower notes
- We focused mainly on technique as well, using different vocalises to strengthen his higher notes
 - I also discussed how when belting, especially when high belting, we never use just our chest voice. It is actually a mix, and we can incorporate different amounts of head and chest to adjust how we want to sound

- The main thing for Brendan is that he has to work this on his own, for at least an hour every day, to strengthen his voice and achieve consistency

Sunday, January 22, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

I began with Nick and Mukta, working on “How Could I Ever Forget?”

- Both of their vocals are coming along beautifully for this piece, so I focused on activating the song
- Before, we had looked at the song as Diana reflecting on and reliving the death of her son. However, I asked her to try the song as a monologue using the objective of forcing Dan to remember that night as well
 - This lent an urgency to the song, and made it active instead of passive
- We also discussed how the song is just as much about the disintegration of Dan and Diana’s relationship as it is about the loss of their son
 - The switch from thinking of that day in the hospital to “The day that I lost you – it’s clear as the day we met.”
- We also discussed the idea of guilt
 - How much do Dan and Diana blame themselves for Gabe’s death? How does this affect them?

We then had a major breakthrough working “Superboy And The Invisible Girl” with Midge and Brendan.

- Midge is doing a great job pulling back at the beginning and letting the song build naturally
- I worked with her on making her mouth tall, instead of wide, when she belts
 - This rounded out the sound and made it easier for her to sing and more pleasant for the audience to listen to
- Brendan made huge progress today, which I am thrilled about
 - At first, he was still struggling belting f’s, and could only falsetto the g’s
 - I then had him flip upside and sing on a “nyah” syllable
 - Following that, I had him push as hard as he could against my hand while still singing on a “nyah”
 - This forces the abdominal muscles to engage, the ones needed to belt properly with support
 - Incredibly, he belted the f’s with ease and the g’s as well
 - We switched to words, and after working it a couple times, Brendan even belted an A!
 - This is the first time he has been able to do that
 - He was stunned and excited, and knows what he needs to do to strengthen this going forward

Towards the end of rehearsal, I reviewed “Better Than Before” with Nick, Mukta, and Midge.

- They are landing the ending harmonies solidly, which I am ecstatic about because some of the chords are not particularly intuitive to the ear
- The only part in which there was an issue was Diana's line, "Gonna get back what I lost there. Gonna find out who I was" (m. 89-90).
 - Mukta was having trouble hearing her melodic line
 - She wanted to go down to an F natural, even though the chords progression and the written lyric line required an F sharp
 - It took several rounds of repetition for her to process the line melody

Monday, January 23, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

I blocked two hours at the start of rehearsal to finish learning "It's Gonna Be Good" and to review "Wish I Were Here."

- "It's Gonna Be Good" is proving to be a huge challenge to learn, because of both the sheer speed of the song and the tricky rhythms and harmonies
- Brendan especially is getting frustrated with himself because he is having trouble picking up his harmonies and counts
- I was not able to shape the song at all today because it took almost the full two hours to hammer down the notes and rhythms
 - To help them, I had them say their notes on the counts they came in on
 - For example, if the line was "It's gonna be good," instead of saying the lyrics they would say "two and three and four..." to get comfortable with where they entered
 - I also had them speak their lyrics to get the rhythms without having to worry about the notes
- "Wish I Were Here" was similarly challenging because of the changing meter and tight harmonies. Fortunately, I could tell that they had been rehearsing this, and we were able to review it more quickly because of this.
 - Mukta and Midge have done an excellent job rehearsing their harmonies for this. We are almost to the point where we can stop focusing on the rhythms and start getting into the text and musicality of the piece.

Later in the evening, we ran "Who's Crazy?/My Psychopharmacologist And I."

- This went extraordinarily well.
- I could tell that they had practiced since the last time we ran this, because they had incorporated all of the notes I had given them, and even fixed the triplet into three-four section.
- After a difficult run of "It's Gonna Be Good," this was an excellent way to end the evening.

Tuesday, January 24, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, after warm-up, we worked on "Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I'm Falling."

- Patrick is having trouble with the meter at the beginning
 - It is in three-four time, but the piano accompaniment plays against this meter a bit, which is throwing him off
 - I had to clap the meter many times with the accompaniment track to get him on the right track.
- The harmonies on “catch me I’m falling, flying headfirst into space” are actually beautifully intact. I was impressed and grateful that the cast had clearly been practicing this section.
- Brendan is having difficulty with rhythm for his “I’m Alive” section of the multi-part portion.
 - He is consistently coming in a beat too early
 - I had him write his beat counts into his score, which seemed to help. The challenge will be him holding his own when everyone gets off-book on Friday.

Wednesday, January 25, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, I began by working “Hey #1-3” with Kyle and Midge.

- These are three separate short songs that follow the same melodic theme, showcasing different moments in Henry and Natalie’s relationship during Act II.
- I worked with both Kyle and Midge on connecting with each other.
 - When singing, both have a tendency to focus more on singing the song correctly than on acting and creating a believable connection with each other onstage
 - I had them speak the song as dialogue to each other, so they could hear where their cadences naturally fall and how they would actually react to each other in this kind of conversation
- I also worked with Kyle on where he is allowed to “sing nicely,” and where he needs to sing in a more conversational tone
 - This is a challenge for him, as in classical musical theatre there is the tendency to sing everything out, loudly and beautifully
 - However, he has made huge strides in his contemporary style, and quickly adapted to my direction

I then moved onto working with Mukta and Brendan on “I Dreamed A Dance.”

- Mukta sang this beautifully
- She incorporated the idea of “growing notes” into this simple waltz, so that every held note lilts and swells wistfully
- The only challenge I face with her is keeping this from turning into a “self-pity” or mournful song. I want to explore the moments of joy that Diana finds dreaming of Gabe instead, which in a way makes the song even more heartbreaking.

Thursday, January 26, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, I began by working “Didn’t I See This Movie” with Mukta.

- One of the biggest challenges Mukta faces as an actor is that she tends to give herself completely over to the music
 - This results in her singing at full volume, occasionally increasing the tempo, and losing control of the song
- My challenge for her was to figure out how to keep control of herself as an actor, even as her character spirals out of control
 - We worked on channeling her emotions into her voice and facial expressions, rather than through large physical gesture

Next, I worked “I’ve Been” and “A Light In The Dark” with Nick.

- Nick is having a lot of troubling memorizing the lyrics, which is troubling, as tomorrow is the off-book date, where the actors should be memorized
- However, he has made a lot of progress singing in the contemporary style of the show
- Nick’s challenge for “A Light In The Dark” is that he has a tendency to want to sing each word separately, instead of thinking about the phrasing of his lyrics
 - To counteract this, I had him speak each sentence to me, then sing it, so that he could hear the difference and where his natural pauses and breaks fall

Friday, January 27, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, I worked “Perfect For You” with Kyle during a free half hour, while Dustyn blocked a scene with the rest of the cast.

- I am so proud of Kyle’s progress in the past couple weeks
- In this run-through of “Perfect For You,” he incorporated all of the notes I have given him about consonant and vowel placement for a contemporary sound, speak-singing versus full singing, and acting the song
- This gave me confidence that he was be able to do the same for “Hey #1-3”

The rest of rehearsal was spent integrating the vocals and blocking of “I’ve Been” through “A Light In The Dark.”

- The most challenging part of this was timing the dialogue vamps between songs with the prerecorded tracks
- Since these particular songs and their interludes are written to flow into one another, there is not a lot of wiggle room in terms of timing the dialogue
- The actors will need to speed up their reaction time to each other’s lines without rushing through them in order to make this timing work

Sunday, January 29, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today was our “stumble-through” of Act I. We began with a vocal warm-up and an hour of review.

- After our usual warm-up of vocalises and diction exercises, I started with “It’s Gonna Be Good”
 - The harmonies, especially Kyle and Brendan’s, keep slipping

- I reminded them that it wastes time to keep refreshing notes, and to start recording our work sessions to practice on their own
- Patrick also consistently misses his “ring” entrance
 - He thinks it comes a beat later than it does
- Brendan is having significant trouble with his “good” lines at the end of the song
 - No matter how many times we clap and count it, he is not landing on the beats with any consistency
 - I worked it under-tempo to try to help him, but he needs to put in the work for this song outside of rehearsal as much as he practices his solos
- We moved onto “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling”
 - This number is actually in decent shape
 - Patrick finally has the timing down for the opening, and is leaning into the acting more as well
 - The harmonies are also solid, even during the more difficult end section
 - The trick part will be timing the song with the vamps
 - Nick and Midge both have specifically timed entrances that will be hard to land without counting the number of vamps (something tricky to accomplish in a scene)
- After this, we worked “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I”
 - The actors have really taken my dynamic notes to heart, which is fantastic to see
 - They have learned to control their volume and airflow
 - In some places, I actually had them give me more volume, which is an easier problem to fix than the other way around
 - This time, “Anxiousness, anger...” was actually slow, which has never happened before
 - This makes me apprehensive – I wonder if they have actually learned the double pattern as opposed to the triplet or if they have just been guessing at the correct tempo
- Finally, we had just enough time to run “Just Another Day”
 - Brendan very pleasantly surprised me today by riff-belting up to a B, which he has never done before
 - He is able to do this when he remembers to keep his head aligned, rather than pushing it forward as he is constantly tempted to do
 - The “bum, bum, bum” section needs help
 - The actors are missing their cues for this, so we will work the timing for this when we have more review time
 - The ending section also got a bit messy

After vocal review, we moved onto the “Stumble Through.”

- Overall, we survived the run in decent shape

- There were a few mistimed vamps, but that will improve as they more strongly memorize their lines
- One of my biggest concerns is the number of times actors dropped lyrics tonight
 - After the run, I reminded them that they have had this music since November, which means that there is no excuse to not know the words of their songs, especially their solos
- I took notes during the show (see “Song Notes For Actors”) which I delivered after the run. Dustyn delivered her notes as well.

Monday, January 30, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began with two hours dedicated to vocal review.

- After warming up the cast, I began with “Just Another Day.”
 - During the stumble through, I found that the ending was being rushed, and that the actors were not sure where to enter on their “bum bum bum” lines, so I worked these sections
 - Mukta was coming in a sixteenth too early for “It only hurts when...” which was throwing the rhythm and tempo of the song off. To correct this, I had her stomp on the downbeat before she sang, which prevented her from jumping in too quickly
 - I started having the actors work on counting their own vamps, instead of me cueing them to enter, so that they can start getting a better feel for the timing
- Following this, we worked “It’s Gonna Be Good”
 - The actors, especially the men, are still struggling with notes and rhythms here
 - I had them take out their phones and record their parts while I played them, because I reminded them that after giving the same note many times, I expect them to know it
 - Hopefully having a recording of their parts will help them practice
 - Brendan is still spotty on the time for his “good” sequence at the end
 - I am still having to aggressively clap out his rhythms here
 - On the bright side, the challenging harmonies on “eat and talk and laugh and joke my family and me” are in good shape
 - Brendan and Patrick also finally got the timing down for their first “Ring”
- Next, we ran “Light,” which we hadn’t touched in a while
 - We are finally at a place with this piece where I can shape and craft very specific moments
 - For example, working certain crescendos and decrescendos during “shine” and “sun”
 - A new moment I added was a straight tone to vibrato on the final “There will be light.”
 - The actors are naturally doing a crescendo there

- I had them hold a straight tone for four counts, then release into vibrato
 - The effect was chilling
- We then moved onto “Wish I Were Here”
 - Midge and Mukta are in strong shape
 - They have mastered the seven-eight time signature, which I am thrilled about, and have corrected the difficulty they were having with the seven-eight to three-four to four-four transition
 - Midge has a beautiful vocal slide on “...fills me with desire” that I love as well
 - The men are still having trouble with their rhythms and harmonies, especially on “It’s the winter wind, it’s fire,” and the “ooh” rhythms that come while Midge and Mukta sing, “Is my brain reborn or is it wrecked...”
 - We ran these rhythms and harmonies both with the track and with me playing the piano until they were able to master them
 - They just need to keep rehearsing in their own time
- After that, we reviewed “Song of Forgetting”
 - Nick, Midge, and Mukta are doing an excellent job with the ending harmonies
 - My challenge to Nick was to find where Dan is singing, and where he is speaking
 - There are places in this song that do not require as full a tone
 - Additionally, I challenged Dan to think about what each memory means to him
 - How do those different emotions color his tone?

After vocal review, Dustyn took most of the cast while I worked with Brendan on “I Am The One” and “I’m Alive.”

- Brendan belted a sustained A today on “I just thought you should know, oh...” after we worked for a bit, which was thrilling
 - I used a combination of preventing his head from rocking forward, making him do a few exercises to keep his breath flowing, having him sing the line first on a “nyah,” and keeping him from overthinking the notes and getting scared
 - The key now will be recreating the sound without doing a half an hour of work to achieve it
- “I’m Alive” gets better every time I hear it
 - The beginning is controlled, many of the notes that were first challenging for Brendan are coming easily now, and even a few of the sustained belting notes are coming out more clearly now
 - The song requires stamina, so I am grateful that Brendan has been putting the time in outside rehearsal every day to work this song, even when we cannot get to it in rehearsal

Tuesday, January 31, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began by working “Song Of Forgetting.”

- The ending harmonies have remained tight
- When we worked the song within the scene, Nick kept wanting to sing his harmony on the second chorus during the first chorus, which does not work because he has a solo in the first chorus – he needs to sing the melody
 - Nick can sing the music with ease, but when he incorporates scene work, it takes him longer to pair the two
 - He drops lines and harmonies because he is concentrating on the acting and blocking
- Another difficulty Nick is having is breaking out of the schema of the song and acting through the verses
 - When he says his lines as a monologue, it still sounds as though he is speaking in verse, instead of processing what he is actually saying
 - It is only when he can break out of this pattern that he will be able to use the music to aid his acting, instead of fighting against it

After this, we moved onto working “Hey #1-3.”

- Kyle has mastered the contemporary style of this music, but is still “singing” too much, instead of acting the song. However, I am glad that we can focus on this issue now, instead of the technical matters of vocal style.
 - When Kyle speaks his songs as monologues, the acting is genuine and exciting to watch
 - We worked on incorporating all of this into his singing
 - We also focused on physical gesture
 - Kyle has some movements habits, especially arm movements, that do not originate in character, but rather from standard “musical theatre gestures.”
 - Now that he is aware of the difference, we are working on specifying and refining this movement

Wednesday, February 1, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After warm-ups, we began with “Seconds And Years.”

- Patrick was under the weather today, so he was having more difficulty singing than usual
 - Therefore, I did not push him hard vocally, and focused on the acting instead
 - Patrick has the song notes down, but is “singing” them too much, so to speak, instead of using the music to achieve an objective or act on an intention
 - I had Nick create a reaction to start the song, to give Patrick something to work off of for rehearsal purposes
 - This made the scene more active
 - The tone of the song has to be conversational: a doctor reassuring his patients

Next, I ran “Aftershocks” with Brendan.

- Brendan has made huge strides on this songs. The notes are easy for him now, so we delved fully into the acting of it.

- There is a shift in the first verse, “You wonder which is worse – the symptom or the cure,” where Gabe’s intention changes. He becomes more dangerous, more threatening.
- We worked individual beats and changes in tactic throughout the song, clarifying and specifying moments.
 - The word “cure” versus “reprieve”
 - “With nothing to remember, is there nothing left to grieve?”
 - Is it really the memory that is causing Diana’s problems, or is it something more?

After this came “Better Than Before.”

- The biggest revelation came from our discovery that Dan’s version of “normal” is having everyone happy all the time.
 - That is why he thinks that Diana’s manic state is good – she seems happy
 - Therefore, he wants to reshape her past in this song by modifying her memories
- There is an abrupt key change after Diana begins to remember her experiences on drugs where Dan quickly cuts her off and moves forward
 - He does not want her to remember what he views as “the bad times”

Following this, I worked “A Promise” with Nick and Kyle.

- They were singing the percussive nature of the accompaniment at first, so we practiced speaking the lines as a monologue first
- We also discussed Dan’s line, “And the boy was a boy for all seasons/That boy is long lost to me now/And the man has forgotten his reasons/But the man still remembers his vow.”
 - Dan at this point does not even remember why he chooses to stay with Diana in this relationship, only that he made a promise and intends to fulfill it by sticking by her side
 - This explains why Diana leaves him at the end – she knows it is healthier for him but that he will never do it of his own accord

Thursday, February 2, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We discussed onset during warm-ups today.

- I noticed while we were doing a warm-up on the vocalise “mayo” that several of the actors did not have a clean onset
 - They were starting the sound before they opened their moves to sing “mayo”
 - I demonstrated the difference between a clean and lazy onset, then had each actor do the exercise individually
 - A few of them had not even been aware that they were doing it, so the realization was helpful for them
 - They will now be able to catch themselves doing it

I then worked with Mukta and Patrick on “You Don’t Know (Reprise)” while Dustyn did scene work.

- The song carries the danger of falling into a “one-note” pattern of just Diana yelling at Doctor Madden, so Mukta and I worked to develop different layers to the song
 - For example, we found softer moments during “Christopher Columbus,” and a colder rage during “I don’t know where the fucking pieces go,” to avoid the song becoming repetitive and redundant.
- I also worked with Patrick to increase his status in the scene
 - As the doctor, he must work to maintain control of the situation
 - However, he was reading as lower status and uncertain in the scene
 - We found posture and line delivery to increase his power and create an interesting struggle for the upper-hand in the scene, as Diana attacks his methods

Next, I worked “How Could I Ever Forget” and “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)” with Nick and Mukta.

- Both Mukta and Nick have made huge character discoveries since we last worked these, so I was excited to see how this would change their interpretation of the music
 - Diana’s line, “How could I ever forget,” has now become more of an attack on Dan, a “How could you *let* me forget?”
 - Dan truly believes that remembering this horrible accident is the root of Diana’s mental illness
 - The song is more active now, with moments of argument and tension, and moments of togetherness
 - It is textured
- Nick and I played with the dynamics of Dan’s lines
 - Where does it make sense to crescendo?
 - Where is it better to sing in falsetto, and what does that communicate?
- I worked with Mukta to make her opening verses more conversational, as opposed to sung
 - This means incorporating more chest voice into her tone
- Even now, Dan is trying to cut Diana off
 - The six-eight measure into three-eight, a spontaneous change that implies Diana has to jump to her next thought to continue speaking
- “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)” is a lot more ominous now
 - The stakes are higher
- I found it interesting that while Dan is still singing it in the same key as the original, the music beneath him has changed to create an unsettling, dissonant tone
 - What does that say about Dan’s character?

Friday, February 3, 6:30-10:30 – Tustin Black Box

I began vocal work today with Nick, Midge, Mukta, and Kyle on “Why Stay?” and “A Promise.”

- I worked with Mukta and Midge on finding ways to differentiate the many times they ask, “Why stay?”
 - Since it is so repetitive, they have to justify each one and find reasons that the phrase is repeated so often
- Nick has a habit of drawing out the consonants on held notes instead of vowels, so we worked on correcting that
 - Otherwise, it makes him sound a bit like a pirate

I then worked with Brendan on “I’m Alive (Reprise).”

- From a technical point of view, this song is difficult in that it requires Brendan to belt a sustained A, which is higher than the range of many tenors
 - He is still holding tension in his neck and shoulders, so I worked to loosen him up by having him walk around and swing his whole body on the higher notes
 - This helped significantly
 - One of Brendan’s struggles is that he gets into his own head too much when singing, which causes him to get nervous and freeze up
- We also worked on discovering why this song occurs now in the show, and what Gabe’s intention in singing it is
 - He is no longer singing just to Diana, but to Dan as well
 - Diana has acknowledged him and let him go, so he must cling to Dan
 - “If you won’t name me, you can’t tame me...”
 - Gabe is more desperate now than he was in the first iteration of this song
 - He needs to be remembered, but he is losing his foothold in the family
 - He is like a cornered animal – even more dangerous

After this, Nick, Brendan, and I worked on “I Am The One (Reprise).”

- At this point in the show, Diana has just left Dan, and he sings, “I am the one who loved you. I am the one who stayed. I am the one, and you walked away.”
- Gabe joins him and they sing to each other, “I am the one who held you. I am the one who cried. I am the one who watched while you died.”
 - This is fascinating, because while it makes sense that Dan would sing this to Gabe, it is trickier to figure out why Gabe sings this to Dan
 - We theorized that the memory of Gabe has always been present in the house, watching over Dan, whether he chose to acknowledge him or not
- Brendan and Nick are both doing well vocally with this, which I am thrilled with
 - Brendan is mastering belting the quick A’s required of this song
 - It is also well within Nick’s range, so we have been playing with different areas to transition from full voice to falsetto

I ended by working with Mukta on “The Break.”

- This song is a marathon in that the words come so quickly it is hard to spit them out and draw breath

- As always, Mukta's challenge is maintaining control of herself as an actor even while her character loses control
- I also asked her to condense some of her large physical gesture-work into her voice
 - Huge arm movements are a safety net for her
 - Having her use her voice to punch instead will strengthen her performance

Sunday, February 5, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

After warm-ups and a review of scene work, I began with vocal work on "Maybe (Next to Normal)" with Midge and Mukta.

- Both actors have a solid grasp on the technical aspects of the piece (notes, harmonies, and rhythms), so I focused on acting through the music.
- For Mukta, we worked on incorporating more of her chest voice into the beginning of the song, to give it more of a conversational tone
 - She was using her mix for this, which sounded beautiful, but did not quite fit the tone of this difficult conversation with her daughter
- For Midge, we worked on finding different beats for Natalie within the song as she communicates her frustrations with, but also her love for, her mother
 - At what moments does she attack? When does she confide?

Later, I worked "The Break" with Mukta.

- Mukta's challenge is still her desire to use wild physical gesture when her characters get emotional, which can actually detract from an audience's connection with a performance
- We worked with the concept that an actor should be eighty percent in his or her character, and twenty percent in control as a performer during the show, to prevent this from happening
- I used a paper-folding exercise with her
 - While singing, she had to concentrate on folding a piece of paper into a paper airplane
 - This kept her hands busy and actually helped her find more nuance in the music
 - After this exercise, Mukta told me that she found the song had settled in more, now that she had to concentrate on Diana's words

Monday, February 6, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

Our first hour of rehearsal today was dedicated to vocal work and review, in anticipation of our first full run-through for the design team.

- I spent most of this time reviewing large group numbers
- "It's Gonna Be Good" and "Wish I Were Here" are still the ones that require the most help, due to their difficult harmonies and rhythms
 - For "It's Gonna Be Good," I continued drilling the opening harmonies, and the timing for the "Ring-a-ling" section, which Patrick and Brendan consistently have trouble entering on

- For “Wish I Were Here,” I focused mainly on the men, who are mixing up which harmonic passages occur where in the music
 - We also worked on counting the seven-eight meter portion
 - Since it is not an intuitive time signature, it requires more practice to do naturally

We then performed the entirety of the show for the designers, so that they could begin to plan lighting and sound cues, as well as consider costumes, set pieces, and props needed for each scene. The run was also crucial for Dustyn and myself; it allowed us to see areas that still needed work, transitions that needed to be ironed out, and moments that needed refining. My notes for this run were as follows.

- “Just Another Day”
 - Mukta was flat on “And you lied...”
 - The actors are missing the timing for the “Bum, bum bum” harmony section
 - I will drill this with them after the run
- “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I”
 - Nick needs to work on singing through the phrases of the song and using crescendos and decrescendos through his held notes
 - We need to refresh harmonies and rhythms during the jazz scatting portions
 - The actors are struggling to sing and dance at the same time
 - They are so focused on getting the choreography down that they are forgetting to sing
 - Patrick entered early on “Use may be fatal”
 - Nick needs to refresh his lyrics towards the end of the song
- “Perfect For You”
 - Kyle was a little sharp on “Our planet is poisoned,” but corrected himself
 - The tempo was rushed tonight, which will not work with a prerecorded track
 - A live orchestra could speed up to follow Kyle, but he needs to keep the tempo for the tracks we are using
- “It’s Gonna Be Good”
 - Similarly to “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” the actors have not reached a point where they are comfortable enough with the choreography to sing and dance at the same time
 - As a result, this song was a bit of a mess today
- “You Don’t Know/I Am The One”
 - Brendan entered early during his and Nick’s riffing portion
 - Mukta began to lose control of her voice during the end of this song
- “I’m Alive”
 - Brendan is still pushing his head too far forward when he sings, which is cutting off the sound

- He also confused the riffing in this piece with that of the reprise, which threw him off a few times
- He needs to support from his diaphragm area
- “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling”
 - Patrick is “singing” the beginning of this song too much
 - It needs to be more conversational
 - He rushed the timing of the first “make up your mind”
 - Midge is having trouble entering the “she’s not there” section on time
 - The timing of the final “catch me I’m falling” needs to be coordinated
 - The actors were taking liberties with the rhythms, which would work for a solo, but not for a piece that four people sing together
- “There’s A World”
 - Brendan dropped some lyrics tonight and switched verses around
- “Didn’t I See This Movie?”
 - Mukta is struggling to hit the final riff on “I walked out...”
 - We might adjust it, as the score calls for an ad lib here anyway
- “A Light In The Dark”
 - Nick again needs to sing through the phrases here and sing on his voice
 - I will review Mukta’s harmony on “It’s like nothing I’ve known” with her
- “Wish I Were Here”
 - This is another number in which the men struggled to sing and perform the choreography at the same time
 - We will continue to drill this until it becomes comfortable
- “Hey #1”
 - The tempo was rushed during the build in intensity
- “Aftershocks”
 - Brendan again struggled with lyrics for this song
- “Hey #2”
 - The tempo was also rushed during the build
- “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)”
 - Nick and Mukta had trouble finding the timing and rhythm for the ending portion
 - They need to keep singing through the end of the music
- “Finale (Light)”
 - The actors sounded like they were only half-singing during this
 - We will work on proper vocal support and blend when we work this tomorrow

Tuesday, February 7, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

Today, we began with work on Finale (Light).

- I concentrated on blend and dynamics for this
 - We added several crescendos, decrescendos, and sforzandos

- For the final note, we also coordinated when the actors would transition from a straight tone to vibrato
- We also discussed the energy needed to sing at different dynamics for the piece
 - In order to effectively sing softly, the vocalist must actually use more energy to properly maintain the note and its intensity
 - This was crucial for the “Let it, let it...” section, which felt very low energy the first time we ran it

After this, I worked on “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling (Reprise)” with Mukta, Patrick, and Brendan.

- I focused mostly on Patrick while working, as he was struggling the most to act through the song and still maintain his character while doing so
- Fortunately, once we ran this number in the scene, he found the urgency necessary to make the scene and the lyrics believable

Following this, we began our work-through of the show, which will last for the rest of this week.

- During this part of the work-through, we focused mainly on the opening number of the show, “Just Another Day”
 - The hardest part of this song for the actors is timing their vamps, several of which occur under dialogue and give no aural cue as to when the vamp has ended and the song is continuing
 - I am currently working with our lighting designer to see if we can time a visual light cue for the actor as an indication that the vamp is ending
- Nick had some trouble hitting his higher belted notes today, which has not happened before. The notes sounded strained, which could be due to fatigue or a lingering illness that has been going around the cast

Wednesday, February 8, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

We continued our work-through today, through page 31 of the libretto, which is the end of “Superboy And The Invisible Girl.”

- The cast is still struggling to sing and move to “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” which means that I will focus on this during our vocal and movement review workshop on Friday
- Kyle and Midge were having trouble timing their dialogue before “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,” running out of underscoring before the song begins
 - After the work-through, I stayed behind with them to practice running through the underscoring a few times so that they had the opportunity to get used to it
 - This mostly involved having Kyle pick up his cues a little more quickly, instead of taking his time between Natalie and Henry’s lines
- Fortunately, “You Don’t Know/I Am The One” is sounding very tight both vocally and in terms of acting

- Brendan and Nick are blending very well during the chorus, and Mukta is maintaining vocal control even as Diana spirals out of control

Thursday, February 9, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

We continued our work-through today.

- Both Dustyn and I worked intensively with Patrick today to differentiate Doctor Madden from Doctor Fine
 - His characterization and physicalization of Doctor Fine has developed incredibly well, so the key here is to find a distinct physicalization of Doctor Madden
 - Patrick is struggling with the idea of status in the show
 - As a professional, Doctor Madden must maintain status when dealing with his patient, Diana, and with Dan
 - Right now, he is too quickly giving up status in the scene, which deflates tension and does not fit his character
 - We worked on how to take status in a scene instead, through both dialogue and physicality
 - After this, “Seconds And Years” and “Better Than Before” came together much more solidly

I worked with Brendan as well on “I’m Alive.”

- He is still stressed about belting the many G notes that the song requires, and placing them correctly
- I focused on helping him find the backspace required to sustain this vocally demanding song
 - This must be achieved through proper breathing and vowel placement
 - To correctly to do, I had him imagine the song bouncing off the back of his skull and ricocheting forward
 - This imagery helped him create a rounder sound
- After working for about half an hour, he was able to find the correct placement for the note
 - The key now will be consistency -- can he do this every time while also acting and moving through the song?

Friday, February 10, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

Today was dedicated solely to reviewing vocal and movement work. After warm-up, I began with the full cast number, “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I.”

- We focused largely on diction for this number
 - While the actors were singing the correct notes, it was almost impossible to understand what they were saying because they were not enunciating enough during the group portions

- When singing in a group, it is necessary to over-enunciate the words to make them understandable to an audience
- Once the cast did this, not only did the words become clearer, the entire song became more energized as well

Next, I worked on “It’s Gonna Be Good” with the full cast.

- This is still proving to be the most difficult number of the show
- Kyle is struggling to find his opening note, which is a third down from the note given by the accompaniment at the top of the song
 - We drilled this multiple times until he could reliably hit it
- The men are also having trouble holding their parts throughout the song
 - After running it a few times, it slips back into their memory, but as I explained to them, during the show they will only have one chance to get it right. It needs to be consistent

Following this, I worked on “Wish I Were Here,” primarily with the men, who sing complicated background harmonies under Diana and Natalie’s solos.

- We made huge progress with this song today
- First, I worked on timbre with the men
 - I explained again the concept of using crescendos through the phrases, which improved the intensity and quality of sound throughout the song
 - I also worked on forward placement with their belts, which also made the song pop further
- The hardest part of the song for them is remembering at which point each background section happens
 - A lot of them sound similar, but with crucial differences
 - We drilled these to get them into muscle memory
- We ran this number with movement afterwards, and while still not perfect, it is a lot stronger and will continue to improve over the next couple weeks

After this, I worked on “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling,” again with the entire cast.

- A lot of this work involved touch-ups, fine-tuning specific moments
- For example, I had Midge, Kyle, and Nick land a contrasting forte on the “you know” line of “Love, I know you know,” which made the moment pop and underscored Dan’s frustration boiling through at this moment
- Later in the song, Kyle had been singing the line, “she’s not there” in falsetto. As soon as I worked with him to land it in full voice, that line of the song popped to life with the harmonies surrounding it
 - Again, the full voice was vital to highlight Natalie’s cry of fury and pain as she longs for her parents to notice her
- Finally, we worked on the diction of the final moments, “Catch me I’m falling...”

- Once the actors worked to over-enunciate their words, this moment again popped to life

I finished by working on the final belting notes of “Superboy And The Invisible Girl” with Midge.

- Midge was having trouble placing the high belting moments correctly in her voice
- I explained that when women high belt, we actually have to incorporate some of our head voice into the belt in order to maintain proper vocal placement, so that it does not sound like we are screaming
- To achieve this, I had her squat against a wall and place the back of her head against the wall as she sang
 - This forces the body to maintain proper alignment and engage the correct muscles
- While she is still not totally there, she is getting more confident in placing her belt in the proper place now
 - It also sounds more free and released

Sunday, February 12, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Due to a family emergency concerning one of our cast members, I spent the first part of rehearsal with that cast member. After this, I returned to help finish out the work-through of the show.

- Most of Act II is sounding clean and is working well
- My biggest concern, surprisingly, is “Finale (Light),” which was the first number we worked on
 - While the notes, rhythms, and lyrics are all technically correct, it is lacking the energy required to deliver a finale number effectively
 - The actors seem like they are “half-singing” for much of the number, even at the forte sections
 - While this may be a problem that simply having an audience will remedy, I am unwilling to wait for opening night to test this theory
 - I worked with them on harnessing this kind of energy through technique, even when it does not always feel emotionally “in the moment” for them

Monday, February 13, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After warm up, I began by running “Just Another Day,” “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” and “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” before we ran Act I.

- For “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” I worked largely on diction and energy
 - When Brendan, Midge, Kyle, and Dan take on the role of “background voices,” they tend to lose both their facial and vocal expressiveness
 - I worked with them to bring that color back into their voices

- Kyle and Nick still have a tendency to swing the eighth notes of “Diarrhea, constipation, nervous laughter, palpitations...” which is causing them to enter late on “Anxiousness, anger...”
 - We drilled straight eighth notes for a bit to fix this habit
- For “Catch Me I’m Falling,” I tightened up some stray harmony notes
 - Brendan was singing a minor chord harmony on “catch me I’m falling for good” when he needed to be singing a major harmony
 - Mukta also was singing a third harmony on “falling” when it actually called for a fourth
- In “Just Another Day,” I also tightened up several sections
 - Brendan and Mukta were both forgetting to sing on “bum bum bum”
 - Additionally, Nick was dropping his, “And you wish you could be going but you stay” line
 - We also discussed urgency in terms of this song
 - I need to believe that “it hurts”

After this, we worked through all of Act I, stopping and starting as needed.

- “Just Another Day” is still missing the necessary energy towards the end

Tuesday, February 14, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We ran Act I without stopping today.

- Mukta was on vocal rest, meaning that she was vocally fatigued so we decided to not have her sing full out today

My notes for Act I were as follows.

- General reminder about mics and talking backstage.
- If you are marking, you need to tell me.
- **Everything Else**
- All of the technical elements are there
- Now let’s bring back that element of discovery
- **Who’s Crazy/Psycho**
- Mukta: bring back the “name” crescendo
- Give me face on “doo”
- Crescendo on “ah”
- We’re still running out of time on “just not fair”
- Patrick better timing on use may be fatal

It’s Gonna Be Good

- Diction needs to be stronger

Here/You Don’t Know/I Am The One

- “He’s not here” ends on an unresolved tone, implying that Gabe might still be here somehow
 - First inkling that Dan might notice him too

I'm Alive

- You missed the first “I’m Alive” riff mid section

Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling

- Patrick late for “Open the door”
- Let the “you know” be a cry of frustration Nick
- I need a bigger build to justify the “she’s not there” cry

I’ve Been

- There’s a change on “I know they won’t though -- not a single word”
- Let that carry you into the chorus

Wednesday, February 15, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box**After warming up, we ran “It’s Gonna Be Good” and “My Psychopharmacologist And I.”**

- Even though we were working Act II, those two numbers will need to be run every day between now and opening night to ensure that they are strong, since they are two of the more difficult numbers of the show in terms of putting vocals to movement
- “It’s Gonna Be Good” is getting stronger every time we run it
 - The harmonies are finally in place without me having to refresh them every time we work on this number
 - The movement is also getting tighter
 - Diction is the major problem left for this number: the actors need stronger consonants on all of their words, especially since the words happen so rapidly
 - The audience will not understand them otherwise
- “My Psychopharmacologist And I” is getting tighter as well
 - We worked on injecting joy and humor into the voices of the background voices as they list off pills and side effects
 - Overall, their expressions need to be bigger and more cartoonish
 - Kyle and Nick are still swinging the eighth notes of “diarrhea, constipation, nervous laughter, palpitations...” which is causing them to enter late for “anxiousness, anger...”
 - I drilled the straight eighth notes with them for a bit to get it into their systems

Following this, we worked through Act II of the show.

Thursday, February 16, 2:30-4:00pm – Weis Music Building

Kyle requested to meet with me outside of rehearsal to work on some of his more difficult pieces.

- For “My Psychopharmacologist And I,” we worked his harmonies during the “doo” section, and his rhythms for the straight eighth notes
- For “Perfect For You,” we again worked on his contemporary sound

- Some of his lyric lines still have the rounded classical quality that we have mostly moved away from
- In “Catch Me I’m Falling,” we practiced his belted, “She’s not there.”
 - We added more resonance to the tone, and I had him focus on supporting the sound using his stomach muscles
- We then ran through “Hey #1-3”
 - We worked on rhythm and timing for some of his lyric lines, which are veering a bit too far away from what is written
 - Kyle is also again getting a bit too classical in the tone of some of his lines

Thursday, February 16, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After warm up, we started again by running “It’s Gonna Be Good,” along with “Wish I Were Here.”

- “It’s Gonna Be Good” still needs stronger diction
 - Brendan also dropped his “good” rhythm towards the end of the number tonight
 - We ran it again to ensure that this was a one-time mistake
- The vocals of “Wish I Were Here” are very strong now
 - It is crucial that we run this number every day, though, because when we add movement, the men tend to drop some of their vocal lines

Following this, we ran Act II without stopping. My notes to the actors on this run can be found in Appendix 13.

After the run, we worked on individual numbers that needed more attention.

- For “Song of Forgetting,” we worked on activating the number so that it was not as internal for Dan, especially
 - Where are the contrasting beats? Where can there be joy?
- For “I’m Alive (Reprise),” we focused on discovering moments of stillness for Gabe within all of the action

Friday, February 17, 6:00-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We started a half-hour early today to incorporate microphones into the show for the first time.

- Our audio coordinators fitted each actor with a microphone and microphone pack, and then ran sound-check for them individually
- This added a new element for the actors, some of whom would be hearing harmonies they had never noticed before, and who would have to be careful of knocking the microphones during scenes

After sound-check, we ran the show using full sound equipment for the first time.

- This was a difficult run

- Possibly due to the new elements we added tonight, the actors were distracted, dropping lyrics, forgetting harmonies, and struggling to maintain character throughout the run
- Many of the notes that Dustyn and I took during this run were notes we had given several times before as well
 - This was, of course, frustrating
- The actors could also sense that the run was going poorly, which further affected their performances
- Due to this, after the run ended we chose not to give notes this evening
 - Doing so would only further lower morale
 - Instead, we typed up our notes and will email them to the actors tomorrow to incorporate into the run on Sunday

Sunday, February 19, 1:00-10:30 pm – Tustin Black Box

Today was our cue-to-cue rehearsal.

- A cue-to-cue rehearsal adds several technical elements, including lights and sound, to the acting for the first time
 - It is known as a “cue-to-cue” because instead of doing a full run-through of the show, we stop and start at every cue change, be it lights or music, to solidify the technical elements throughout the performance
 - This is a slow and challenging process, which is why we always allot a full Sunday to complete it

We worked Act I from 1:00 until 5:00.

- Ultimately, most of the notes that I took for the actors during this portion were notes that I had previously given them
- Hopefully, the reason for this was because we were doing a disjointed cue-to-cue instead of a full run
 - They might not have been in the correct headspace to recall all of their notes and corrections

We took an hour break for dinner, then worked Act II from 6:00 until 9:00.

- Act II went better than Act I in terms of the actors working through their notes and corrections. However, we still have work to do before we open.

Appendix 9

Production Poster

Designed by Adrienne Beaver

THE BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE PRESENTS

NEXT TO NORMAL

Music by **TOM KITT**
Book and Lyrics by **BRIAN YORKEY**
DUSTYN MARTINCICH Director
ALEX GOLDEN '17 Music Director

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, & MONDAY
FEB. 24, 25 & 27 at 7:30pm
SUNDAY, FEB. 26 at 2pm
TUSTIN STUDIO THEATRE

"I don't need a life that's normal.
That's way too far away,
but something next to normal
would be ok."

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Appendix 10

Music Director's Program Notes

Musically, *Next to Normal* is unique. While classified as a pop-rock show, its style ventures into jazz waltzes, doo-wops, and even folk ballads. The score's lack of a unified form is part of what drew me to *Next to Normal*. In the words of composer Tom Kitt, "The story always drove the music." With lyricist Brian Yorkey, Kitt developed each song with the style of music he found necessary to tell the Goodmans' story at that point in the show.

This approach, in which content influences form, presented me with an exciting challenge in terms of music direction. The integrated nature of the score, in which song blends seamlessly into scene, meant that I was looking at far more than vocal technique and harmonies while working with the cast. Over the course of our rehearsal process, we explored why particular styles were used for each song, why certain melodies were paired with specific lyric lines, how a specific chord progression might inform a character's intention and emotional state and affect an actor's interpretation of the piece. We played with timbre, dynamics, and tone. And of course, we looked at how each song is used to further the story of the Goodman family.

A musical is, above all, a collaborative process. Without Professor Dustyn Martincich's willingness to jump aboard as stage director, and her commitment to forging a cohesiveness between the stage and music direction of our show, I would never have gotten this project off the ground. Similarly, our cast's eagerness to dive into this adventure with me, their keen investigation of their characters through the music of the show, and their commitment to doing this story justice, is nothing short of astounding.

I hope you enjoy what we have created together in this space. We are honored to share this remarkable show with you.

-Alex Golden

Appendix 11

Bucknellian Interview on *Next to Normal*

Written by Madison Weaver, Assistant News Editor

Published March 2, 2017

Mental illness and suburban life were the prevailing themes of the Theatre and Dance department's pop-rock rendition of "Next to Normal." The show ran from Feb. 24—27 in the Tustin Studio Theatre. Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance Dustyn Martincich served as the director of the musical. Alex Golden '17 was in charge of the show's music direction.

The "Next to Normal" cast starred Mukta Phatak '18, Brendan Trybus '18, Nick Talbot '19, Midge Zuk '19, Kyle Cohick '20, Patrick Newhart '18, Emma Miller '20, and Franz Schauer '20.

The show follows the lives of the Goodman family, detailing the mother's struggle with bipolar disorder after the loss of her child and how the family attempts to cope with her illness. "Next to Normal" does not shy away from addressing important issues such as mental illness, grief, drug use, suicide, marriage and relationships, and the complexities of family relationships.

Golden was pleased by how the musical brings these problems into the spotlight.

"Mental illness is a topic constantly brushed under the rug in everyday life. For me, this show was a way to bring these discussions out into the open, and to show that these are things that 'normal' people deal with," Golden said.

Golden discussed her unique experience in "Next to Normal," as a student has never music directed a Mainstage theater event. After persistent discussions and proposals, Golden was able to act as the music director for the piece as her honors thesis and senior independent study.

"If even one person saw the show and came away from it saying, 'Someone out there gets me. Maybe I'm not alone in this,' I will have done my job," Golden said.

For the last two showings, Golden filled in for Talbot as the character Dan, the father of the family, while reading from the script book.

"When I got the call on Sunday morning that I would be filling in, I knew there was no way I would be able to recreate [Talbot's] nuanced, complex performance in a matter of hours ... my greatest challenge was figuring out how to be there for my actors in an emotionally demanding show, stepping in for an actor they had become comfortable working with in that context, in a short period of time," Golden said.

All of the actors on stage delivered powerful performances, exploring family life and mental illness through the relatable characters and pop rock songs throughout the show.

“[The actors’] professionalism and trust in me carried the show. I could not have done it without them,” Golden said. “It is very rare, as a student music director, to walk into a rehearsal and feel nothing but support and trust from your cast every single day.”

Appendix 12

Actor Post-Production Surveys

In order to assess my success in this endeavor, and to evaluate what worked in my process and what needed revision, I requested that each actor complete a post-production survey. In the surveys, I asked the actors to describe their experience with the rehearsal process, to determine in what ways they had grown vocally and as actors, and to pinpoint the most valuable lesson they had taken away from the process. I used these surveys to assist me in writing this section, and to determine how effective my techniques actually were to the actors.

Name: Midge Zuk

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

Starting from the first rehearsal, Goldie created a joyful and supportive yet focused and disciplined environment. Since our cast was already close friends with each other and with her, she had the added difficulty of wrangling our craziness, and she always knew when to let us indulge in levity and when to guide us back to hard work. Dustyn followed a similar pattern when we started working with her after spring break, and since Goldie and Dustyn seemed to be on the exact same page, our cast could experiment and explore with either of them and know that the progress made would translate to the others' vision, instead of being looked at as a detriment or "going behind" the other director. Instead, since Goldie and Dustyn were so supportive of one another and equally collaborative, we were able to progress and grow much faster than I have ever experienced in other production settings, where the music director only cares how the cast sounds and stays out of the acting and the director does not know how to balance acting choices with vocal health. These two created an absolute dream team, and their support of each other and all of us is the only reason this show had any success.

This support from the creative team helped our cast grow together as well, which was crucial when handling such a heavy and sensitive show. Through Dustyn and Goldie's gentle balancing act of hilarity and seriousness throughout rehearsals, we were able to work with the most intense scenes as easily as possible, without breaking down and crying every 20 minutes (which we very well could have, given the material). With our fearless leaders at the head constantly offering to talk outside of rehearsal or help create rituals to "get out of the show" (separate the characters from ourselves in order to protect ourselves from the baggage of the characters), we knew we could really dive into the material, without fear of hurting ourselves or another actor. Again, when people compliment the depth of understanding of the characters and situations within the musical, know that this was only possible due to Goldie and Dustyn.

The support didn't just stop in rehearsal, however; since we as a cast were dedicating so much time to the show (we all practiced at least an hour a day outside of rehearsal, limited our diets for maximum vocal and physical health, and often visited the steam room together), and this led to

us bonding even more after rehearsals, when we would forego traditional campus weekend activities to take over Perkins or Applebees to inhale half-priced apps and joke around as an ensemble (by “ensemble” I mean Goldie, Genna, and the stage management team (Dustyn was always invited but often had other priorities i.e. her newborn child)). The people involved with the show became my absolute ride-or-die best friends onstage and off; we all depended upon one another in so many ways that it was impossible to separate us. Having these all-team bonding nights created a positive family atmosphere that helped us work seamlessly together, I am incredibly grateful for it in so many ways, but I was especially grateful for those nights when we had our pre-matinee meeting that fateful Sunday.

Going into the shows, our cast was highly concerned that we were not going to do our best, and the thought of letting our incredible directors down broke our hearts. We called ourselves in for an added rehearsal the Saturday before tech and ran through the problem numbers over and over, nit-picking ourselves to follow all of the notes we had been given and asking each other for advice and ideas on moments that we felt had never landed. It seems so silly now, but those extra two hours on that Saturday really helped us ease our minds going into tech. And while tech was still stressful and we never felt that the show really landed before our first performance, we knew we had something really, really special and that an audience was the missing link to our success. By giving us both the dress rehearsal and the donation-only preview to do the show with an audience, Goldie and Dustyn pushed the show to be its very best by the time we got to Friday’s performance, as we were technically two shows in when we got to opening night. This is just another example of how they knew what we needed and worked to provide it so that we could benefit as actors and as people.

The shows on Friday and Saturday were a perfect example of how our support as an ensemble was a crucial ingredient to this show’s success. Despite technical difficulties or the feeling of personal failure, we relied on one another to pull ourselves out of our actor heads and continue to focus on our duty as performers to share the story with the audience. For example, I personally never really felt like “Everything Else” landed the way I wanted it to; coming out of “Just Another Day”, I usually felt really out of breath, and then would get frustrated when I would focus too much on the singing and lose the storytelling. However, I then would sit facing backwards and frozen on the piano bench throughout the entire opening of “Who’s Crazy/ My Psychopharmacologist...”, and hearing Mukta crush that song gave me the confidence I needed to pull myself out of my own critical head and back into Natalie. As we passed each other backstage, we’d squeeze sweaty hands or pat each other on the back, always reminding each other that we would not let the other fall. Goldie would come down at intermission and calm our ever-present fears that we weren’t doing a good enough job and tell us that the audience was loving it. All of our bonding during the rehearsal process became visible and necessary during the run of the shows.

Which is why Sunday morning's news, while devastating, was not disastrous. While Nick obviously had a major role on our team, as did everyone, due to the incredible strength of our network, we knew we could still perform the show and that Goldie would seamlessly fit right into the role of Dan. Although Goldie was not technically part of the original cast, since we had bonded so much as a complete ensemble, it didn't really matter; we had the same immense trust in her that we had in Nick, and we knew she felt the same way, so we could rely on her to pull us through just as we had with Nick and it would all still be successful. With the foundation of hard work and endlessly deep character exploration, thanks to both Dustyn and Goldie, we could re-shape the show to see how our characters would interact when Dan had different qualities and traits, which allowed us to still have a believable family and tell the story successfully. Working with this curveball forced us to all grow even closer and cherish the time we had together even more, which I honestly didn't know was possible until it happened.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

This show taught me how to act. It sounds insane, but it's true. And the only reason I could act is because I finally learned how to marry singing and acting into one art form, instead of thinking of the two separately, which is all thanks to Goldie. By helping us find musical hints and messages that are interspersed throughout the score, Goldie taught us so much more about our characters than we ever would have known ourselves, as none of us are as well-versed in anything musical as she is. Because of her, we had an extra key to character exploration, and by combining what we knew musically with what we were exploring with Dustyn in the libretto, we could embody these characters in every aspect, whether we were singing a solo where all eyes were on us or sitting on a separate part of stage while prioritized action occurred elsewhere.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

This process re-taught me how much work needs to go into a show in order for it to be truly successful. While I spent my high school shows being forced to score my script for homework and spending late nights trying to find the perfect verb for every line in a song, the work for this show came from honest passion for the story and the people involved, which is why we all worked SO hard. Any success we had as actors came because we had detailed every single image with Goldie and Dustyn, allowing us to live realistic human lives onstage instead of schmacting our way to the big dramatic beats. While we had so much fun in rehearsals (and out of rehearsals), we were also working so, so hard.

Name: Mukta Phatak

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

We rehearsed 6 nights a week for 4 hours each night. Personally, I needed every one of them. Luckily, because of my amazing co-actors, there was never a rehearsal that went to waste. Every day, I discovered something new about Diana, or something nuanced about a relationship she had with another character. I had challenges, no doubt, one of which was staying mentally healthy in the process. A few weeks in, I started to freak out because I would go home from rehearsal ready to unwind and do some homework, but Diana's voice would not leave my head. So, I started having a separate set of clothing for rehearsal, and I would go through a ritual every night to enter and exit the space. Another challenge was physicalizing the mental state of Diana. While I would initially go through scenes feeling emotionally everything Diana was feeling, I would only put myself there mentally, and would not send that energy out. I would leave scenes feeling emotionally exhausted, and not having given anything to my fellow actors. That's not good. So, I focused on physicalizing what I was feeling, and that got easier.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

Vocally, I grew very much. I started to understand the intricacies of singing and acting at the same time. One exercise that was particularly helpful was distracting my mind and hands with a different task, like folding a fortune teller, while singing a song. I did this with "The Break", and it changed everything about that piece for me. It allowed me to let go of the high energy destructive force that I was initially acting upon, which was a surface level incidental energy, and I accessed the core distress that was prevalent in the scene; a quieter, more desperate lucidity.

Another helpful tip was understanding that the orchestration is there to tell a story as well, and our job as actors is to tell a different layer of the story, rather than echoing the orchestration. It is an added treat when the audience can hear the subtext and the surface text in a package of voice and orchestration.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

Personally, as an actor, this process gave me wings. I started to trust myself as an actor, I allowed myself to take risks with a cast that I knew would catch me and bounce me back, because I knew I would do the same for any of them. Craft-wise, it was important for me to realize how to stay vocally healthy for the duration of a full run-through. Two acts as Diana is vocally taxing, and reminding my actor-self of that during shows was very important and something I learned to work with. Sometimes, when you conserve yourself vocally, you are forced to make stronger acting choices physically, or you have to justify a choice to not belt a note full-out.

I also took away an amazing sense of gratitude. I am eternally lucky and grateful and in awe of how many lovely lovely people I got to work with on Next to Normal. It was a formative experience for me. I will refer back to the moments and learnings I gained from this process. I love everyone that was involved with the production, and I learned that ensemble is paramount. Our show could not have been what it was had we not all leaned in to each other, and trusted each other so completely. Truly, it would have been a completely different show. Perhaps still excellent, but not the depths that we were able to reach together. Ultimately, the final leap is one of intuition and trust. It is a soft good, while craft and preparation are the hard goods. And this show had that. I never want to do another show where we don't establish that sort of ensemble, that's what I took away from this process.

Name: Kyle Cohick

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

I played Henry in Bucknell's production of *Next to Normal*, which was music directed by one, Alex Golden. The rehearsal process started I believe in late November/ early December with music rehearsals. These rehearsals consisted for the most part of four hour rehearsals just about every week night where the six of us in the cast and Goldie and Lauren Scott, the ASM, would sit in a classroom in the Weiss Music Building and dedicate our time to learning the parts. We didn't even talk about character at that point, the goal was solely to learn the music and to start making the music second nature. These rehearsals were incredible productive and on task almost 99% of the time, and yet I still felt like they were intimate and I began to start bonding with the cast.

At the end of winter break we moved into rehearsing in the space. Before we even started using the black box, we began in the adjoining dance room, focusing on finding the characters and defining who they are. Dustin, our faculty acting director, did a ton of exercises to help us accomplish this task such as movement based tableaux, body outlines, character biographies, and timeline production. The movement based tableaux and the other movement work was especially important in the process I think because it let the cast really start to interact in a trial by fire kind of way. We were just basically thrown into this very vague task and told to interact and creating a meaningful communication and that's where I think a lot of the walls that people inherently have up began to come down a little bit.

Then we began work in the space and delving into the scenes and the dialogue and how deliver the songs. We worked things a ton of ways. Sometimes we would just go into a scene and do it once and feel what felt natural. Then Dustin would come in and give us direction of where to go acting wise. Other times with songs Goldie would have us talk through dialogue and go through line by line so we could understand everything that we were saying and why we were saying it. She was very big on two things: One contemporary sound and two the purpose of these songs in the show. Goldie repeatedly stressed to us that because of the dearth of dialogue in the show, the songs took the place of those scenes and for all intents and purposes the songs were just scenes set to music. She made it clear that the music was there to help tell the story and not just as ornamentation and I couldn't have been happier about that.

Movement was then handled by a third director, Genna Hartnett. She worked with us to create movement and gesture based choreography to go along with the scenes and find consistent character mannerisms to play throughout the show.

Finally, all of this was brought together in the final show which was one of the coolest experiences of my rather inexperienced life so far. The first two performances were awesome,

but then when Nick fell ill, I was blindsided. I was so worried both about Nick and the show, but Goldie coming in saved the performance. She barely needed the book because she had been with us for every step of the journey over the three months of rehearsals and she played the part brilliantly. Even if that hadn't happened though and Nick had done all four shows, the show just had this way of being different every night. If I had to place it somewhere it would have been in the liveliness of the characters and the sporadic nature of the show that caused constant shifts in the directions of scenes and just different things clicked differently every night, but they clicked nonetheless. Altogether, it was a process I was very thankful to Goldie for giving me the opportunity to be a part of.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

I grew so much over the process of this show. Goldie is a fantastic musician and teacher and because of her I feel like a much stronger performer both vocally and acting wise. I spent all of my high school career singing classically and mostly as part of larger ensemble. So, the fact that Goldie showed me how to take my training and apply it to a contemporary sound both in pronunciation of words and also in placement of sound, that's just something I'm really thankful for. As an actor at the end of this process I think I experienced a lot of new things as an actor. I played a character who is like me but also something I've never quite played before. The relationship I had on stage was something that I've never quite achieved before and the handling of intimacy work was so well done on Dustin's part that I think the Henry/ Natalie relationship flourished on stage.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

My biggest takeaway is the fact that the only difference between people who are doing huge awesome productions and making these huge projects happen is drive. Goldie made all of this happen and she's been working to make it happen for about a year and a half now, probably longer, and at the end she had something truly special. I want to thank her for showing me that.

Name: Nicholas Talbot

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

Very positive. Rehearsals were well organized and meaningful explorations of music and character. All elements of the musical were interconnected in rehearsal (music informed acting and vice versa). Also they were very fun and relaxed.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

I grew as an actor in finding truthful basis for movement and reaction onstage. I grew as a vocalist in better connecting lyric with music. Specifically, growing or shrinking dynamic on held notes and phrasing.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

The value of working in a highly connected ensemble.

Name: Patrick Newhart

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

This experience was completely a brand-new experience and I enjoyed every moment of it. Coming in, I was honestly nervous. I was the only member of the cast (including the music director) that had no professional training and very little acting/theatre experience. I had only done one show in the past, with my only vocal experience being a recreational acapella group – so I was very intimidated by my cast mates. However, as the process went on, every person came to become more and more supportive of one another, and I had found support and encouragement from everyone. I must say, rehearsals and performances were incredibly professional, but never did I feel unhappy that I had decided to take up this project as a recreational activity for non-professional growth. Every time we were together as an ensemble, a safe, friendly and fun environment was created which encouraged collaboration and support from one another, all while being efficient and meaningful in our use of our time together. The performances were also incredibly rewarding. By the end of the process, I felt so connected to the material and the cast/crew that I had total faith and trust in what we were doing.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

I have immensely grown in my ability to have confidence in myself and my ability to make daring choices on impulse and heart rather than reason. At the beginning, I was always second guessing myself, a little nervous of being judged by these people who have clearly had years of training and practice perfecting their skills, but they showed me that there is no harm in being yourself and taking risks in choices. I think in addition to confidence, I have also grown immensely with technique from singing and character development. I have gotten so much more insight on character development and was able to spend a lot of time with the music director developing proper singing techniques, and learning the nuances in producing different quality vocals.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

My biggest takeaway, to quote High School Musical, was that “we’re all in this together”. Honestly, I have never been more connected to a group of people working toward a common goal. There was so much love and support for one another to grow and to create a unique show. This is an experience that I will always have with me and never take for granted.

Acknowledgments

As John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island.” This is especially true for those of us working in the art of theatre, whose very essence lies in the collaboration between artist and designer, artist and creative team, and artist and audience. So with that in mind, I must take a moment to acknowledge the many people who have helped me in this massive undertaking, and without whom *Next to Normal* would have never gotten off the ground.

First, I need to thank the Department of Theatre and Dance for giving me this incredibly special opportunity. The faculty took a risk in granting me this senior project; a student had not taken on a musical as an independent study anytime in recent history, and I knew I was asking a lot of the department in terms of faculty design assistance and budget. I am grateful every day for their faith in me, and for their help and support throughout these past two semesters.

Professor Gary Grant was the first faculty member I approached about this project during my first year at Bucknell. Although he cautioned me that a student had never been allowed to pursue a musical as an independent study before, instead of discouraging me from the project, he asked me detailed questions over the next two years to help me refine my ideas and proposal, and discussed the project at length with the rest of the department faculty before I submitted my official proposal. His support, guidance, and direction over my time at Bucknell has meant the world to me. I would not be the actor and director I am today without him. Similarly, I would not have been half as successful as a student here with Professor Anjalee Hutchinson’s incredible life advice. Her calm, wise presence has guided me through many a difficult situation.

Without my thesis advisor, Professor Dustyn Martincich, *Next to Normal* could never have happened. Despite her self-professed initial dislike for contemporary musicals, when the department expressed hesitation at approving my project without a faculty stage director to assist me while I music directed, Dustyn immediately volunteered, even knowing the immense time commitment and energy that would be spent on the project. I have had nothing but the most positive of experiences working with Dustyn; I learned so much from watching her direct, and collaborating with her to bring song and scene together was one of my great joys in this project. The fact that she dedicated four hours a night to us after having just had a baby makes all of this even more impressive.

I also need to thank my unbelievable team working on this project with me. My stage manager, Lauren Scott, runs the tightest ship of anyone I’ve ever worked with. Her organizational skills are unmatched, as is her ability to handle a crisis (demonstrated when one of our leads fell ill shortly before the Sunday matinee). Her assistant stage managers, Emma Smith, Franz Schauer, and Caitlin Kalsbeek, were an indispensable help to this project. I must also thank our faculty designers Elaine Williams, Mark Hutchinson, and Heath Hansum for their magnificent work; they elevated the quality of this production enormously. Additionally, I would like to thank our costume designer, Rosalind Elise Parenzan, audio technicians Drew Hopkins and Allen Taylor, makeup artists Amber McDonnell and Delaney Clark, and movement director Genna Hartnett. A special thank you as well goes out to Professor Bill Flack in the Department of Psychology, who came in to speak to my cast about the mental illnesses Diana fights in *Next to Normal*.

Finally, thank you to my incredible cast: Mukta Phatak, Midge Zuk, Nick Talbot, Brendan Trybus, Kyle Cohick, and Patrick Newhart. Thank you for trusting me, for showing up every day eager to work, and for loving and supporting each other. You made my job so much easier with your passion for this special show. I cannot thank you enough.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre.....	1
Approach to Music Direction as a Thesis.....	2
Dramaturgical Research.....	5
Score Analysis.....	12
Music.....	12
Lyrics.....	43
Outside References.....	46
Music Directing <i>Next to Normal</i> : The Process and Production, at Bucknell University.....	50
Working With Actors.....	51
Tech Week.....	66
Performances.....	69
Reflections.....	73
Bibliography.....	75
Supplementary Materials: Production Photos.....	78
Appendices.....	81
1. Initial 319 production proposal	
2. Audition and callback journal	
3. Cast list	
4. Example of fall semester design meeting notes	
5. Song breakdown by character	
6. Example of production meeting minutes	

7. Example of rehearsal report
8. Rehearsal journal
9. Production poster
10. Music director's program notes
11. Bucknellian interview on *Next to Normal*
12. Post-production actor surveys

Abstract

As a junior at Bucknell University, I was granted permission by the Department of Theatre and Dance to music direct Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey's *Next to Normal* during the winter of my senior year as a THEA 319 Independent Study. This is a course I applied for in my junior year, but began preparing for as a first year student after deciding I wished to pursue a 319 in music direction. I spent the next year researching musicals to find one that would be both manageable for our department in terms of cast size, style and budget, and relevant for the Bucknell community.

My passion for music direction stemmed from an interest in the ways in which a composer uses the music of a show to enhance character and further the plot, just as a book writer uses dialogue and stage directions. Musicals consist of four overarching elements: music, movement, acting, and design. Productions are most powerful when these elements are fully integrated and working towards the same vision. However, the music of a show is not often considered when discussing acting and directing intention; the music director teaches the notes, while the stage director coaches the acting. As a music director, I was drawn to how I could help actors use songs and orchestration to create stronger, more nuanced moments on stage.

I was first drawn to *Next to Normal* by its electric, pop-rock score. A sung-through show, most of the action and exposition is contained within the music; even when a character is not singing, their lines are usually accompanied by underscoring. It seemed like the perfect show with which to explore my specific interests in music direction. Furthermore, its small cast of six people and relatively low-budget needs in terms of design meant it would be manageable for our

department. Additionally, I was struck by the production's exploration of mental illness within a suburban family; it held a message relevant to Bucknell's campus climate.¹

During the fall of my senior year, I received permission to further pursue this project as an honors thesis as well. Writing a thesis in conjunction with music directing a production of *Next to Normal* allowed me to delve further into researching the history of the production and of musical theatre in general, and to more deeply analyze the score. I was able to explore the analytical side of the production, as well as the artistic.

Throughout the fall semester, stage director Dustyn Martincich and I held design meetings with the faculty and students working on all technical aspects of the production, to ensure a cohesive vision for the production. Dustyn and I held open auditions for all interested Bucknell students early fall semester in order to cast our ensemble. Then, over a seven-week rehearsal period that included fall semester music rehearsals and four hours a day of spring semester rehearsals six days a week, Dustyn, stage manager Lauren Scott and her assistants, movement director Genna Hartnett, our cast, and I worked to build character, learn music and blocking, and form genuine, honest connections onstage. In the week leading up to performances, we added design and technical elements, such as lights, costumes, and sound, before opening for a successful weekend of performances, despite the fact that I was required to step in for one of our leads when he became too ill to perform in our Sunday and Monday shows.

My ultimate goal in working with my actors was to use the music to help them enhance and deepen their characters and relationships in the show. In addition to this, I also worked with them on vocal technique and on achieving the contemporary style of singing necessary for a rock musical such as *Next to Normal*.

¹ See Appendix 1 for full 319 proposal.

Overall, this project has heavily influenced how I approach my work as a music director, and has given me various tools to use when working with actors going forward. In speaking with audience members after the show, I also found many of them were interested in starting dialogues on mental illness after experiencing our production. It was incredibly satisfying to know that I had accomplished at least the beginnings of what I set out to achieve. I am curious to see if these discussions will continue after this project is complete.

The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre

Approach to Music Direction as a Thesis

The fascinating thing about music direction is that there are no strict guidelines to follow. There is no “right” way to music direct, no single path to follow. In conversations with several music directors in the industry, I found that each came from a different background of training and education and that each possessed a different style and approach toward music direction. For example, the primary concern of one director was technique and ensuring that the actors could perfectly execute every melody and harmony written on the page. Another director preferred to take liberties with the score; if an actor sang an alternate melody or riff that he enjoyed, he would keep it as part of the final production. In the industry, music directors are hired precisely because of the unique flavor they will bring to a show and how well their style meshes with the vision a director and producer have for the production.

Regardless of the style or approach, however, all music directors are responsible for helping their actors use the musical score to enhance their performances. In musical theatre, there are four overarching elements of the production: music, movement, acting, and design. When these elements are working together cohesively, the result is an integrated, powerful audience experience. If a production fails, often the reason is a lack of communication between two or more of these elements. Over the years, I have found that there is a strange disconnect for actors in musical theatre between song and scene. They closely analyze all lines of dialogue and stage direction, but as soon as a song begins, they drop character completely and proceed merely to sing the lyrics. Or, having been told to “act the song,” they interpret that as needing to fight against the music and rhyme scheme, and speak as much of the song as dialogue as possible, which defeats the purpose of having a song there in the first place. They see the music as something that hinders their acting, instead of a tool that can aid them.

Taking my previous experiences and developing research into account, I wanted to focus my role as a music director on integrating the music with the other tiers of a musical production.² My approach consisted of three main principles. First, all musical choices, both those made by the composer and those made by the actor, must be justified by acting intention. Second, the songs and underscoring of a show should enhance the director's interpretation of the show. Third, strong vocal technique and style are crucial in order to maintain the health of the actors throughout the course of the show.

Music directing *Next to Normal* as an honors thesis consisted of research and practice both artistic and analytical. I began by conducting dramaturgical research on the history of the show and of musical theatre itself to better understand *Next to Normal*'s context in the musical theatre cannon. I heavily researched the composer and lyricist, Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, respectively, using the knowledge gleaned from this to help guide my analysis of the musical score. Throughout the fall and spring semester, I attended weekly design and production meetings with department faculty to ensure that each production element was working towards the same unified vision for our show. Additionally, stage director Dustyn Martincich and I met frequently outside of rehearsal to discuss our interpretation of the show and maintain cohesiveness between the music and stage direction. After teaching my actors the music during the fall semester, we began our rehearsal process in earnest following winter break. We rehearsed four hours a night, six days a week, incorporating design elements in the week leading up to performances. During this time, I also helped coordinate the actors' microphones and the prerecorded musical tracks with our audio-technicians.

² This differs from the role, for example, of a choral music director, who deals primarily with the element of music, and does not have to contend with elements of character, movement, and design when working with singers.

Normally, the job of a music director would include hiring and conducting a live pit orchestra during performances. However, due to the constraints of the 319 in terms of space and budget, I made the decision to use a pre-recorded musical accompaniment. A live orchestra could easily overwhelm an audience acoustically in a small black box, and purchasing pre-recorded tracks would be significantly more manageable than hiring and training several musicians. We used the tracks for the duration of the rehearsal process, which eliminated the uncertainty a live orchestra added a week before opening can bring to a show. With the recorded tracks, however, we lost a certain magic that comes from the interaction between actor and musician, as the musician responds to subtle differences in an actor's performance from night to night, and creates greater nuance than a pre-recorded track will allow. A track also cannot cover for a missed cue, should an actor enter late or drop a lyric. Overall, however, I did not find that the tracks detracted in any noticeable way from our production.

Dramaturgical Research

Before stepping into my first rehearsal, I found it crucial to conduct dramaturgical research on the composers of *Next to Normal*, Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, and their process. Only through this research, in which I delved into the duo's writing process, examined the scope of their work both separately and as individuals, and explored the work of composers who had influenced them, could I enter rehearsals with a firm grasp of music's role in *Next to Normal* and make educated choices about my music direction style.

Kitt and Yorkey first collaborated while studying at Columbia University, writing and composing the music for the university's centennial Varsity Show, which is also how another famous duo, Rodgers and Hart, first met as well, decades earlier. Author Josh Getlin notes in the Columbia Magazine article, "The Ballad of Kitt and Yorkey," "Their working style was fluid and flexible. Sometimes the lyrics came first, dictating a musical moment; sometimes music defined a scene, and Yorkey wrote words to match it. On occasion both men sat down at a piano together and wrote songs spontaneously" (Getlin 3).

Understanding this style of collaboration was key when I approached the musical score of *Next to Normal*. One of the first things I noticed about the score was a lack of unified style among the many songs of the show. *Next to Normal* is considered a contemporary rock musical; Brian Yorkey explains the decision to pursue this style in a *Stage Directions* interview with Bryan Reesman, stating, "The show deals in extremes of emotion, especially extremes of sadness and anger and frustration, and I think that no kind of music expresses anger and frustration and being at the end of your rope the way rock music does" (Reesman 15). This decision has a twofold effect on the show: firstly, it allows the characters to express themselves in a style of music that they would realistically be exposed to in their everyday lives, on the radio and as part

of their culture. Secondly, it gives the audience a heightened connection to the show. Whereas musicals done in a traditional style, or with a highly stylized or pastiche form, can distance an audience from a show, *Next to Normal* pulls its viewers in with music relevant to their existence. In his foreword in the published copy of *Next to Normal*'s libretto, Anthony Rapp³ describes his first experience with *Rent*, saying, "It was that rare thing in musical theatre: a show that spoke directly to me about the world I lived in. It utilized music that sounded more like the modern rock I listened to than anything from traditional musical theatre, and featured characters that reflected the lives of myself and my friends" (Rapp 12). He notes that *Next to Normal* has a similar effect on its actors and viewers.

However, despite its label as a rock musical, *Next to Normal* often ventures far from the territory of modern rock music; in one scene, the characters sing and dance to a jazz waltz, while later on they perform a doo-wop number. Overall, its score is far less cohesive than those of its contemporaries.⁴ In the same interview with Reesman, Tom Kitt explained his inclusion of various musical styles in the score, saying,

"For me, the story always drove the music...For the pharmacologist number,⁵ for example, I remember the day we hit on the jazz waltz. I wanted to desensitize the drugs, almost make it feel like it's in radio jingle land because I think there is a sense, especially on television...that they do try to desensitize a little bit what they're selling. So musically it seemed to me that that wistful, spring-in-your-step

³ Anthony Rapp originated the role of Mark in *Rent* on Broadway. *Rent* has been marked as a defining influence on contemporary musical theatre. Similarly to *Next to Normal*, it tackled subjects previously considered taboo for musicals, such as the AIDS epidemic, and is often compared to *Next to Normal* as its predecessor.

⁴ This is in comparison to musicals such as *Rock of Ages*, which follow a very defined style of music.

⁵ Here, Kitt refers to "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I," a number in which Diana visits her psychopharmacologist over a period of a few months as he prescribes her different drug regimens to regulate her bipolar disorder.

type music worked well for that, as opposed to saying, ‘This needs to be jazzier.’”
(Reesman 14).

Kitt’s interview informed me that the music composition in *Next to Normal* is just as crucial to understanding the characters and story as the dialogue, lyrics, and stage directions. Every melodic line, orchestral motif, and time signature was written to aid the story in some way. I used this knowledge moving forward in rehearsals with my actors to help them build character or interpret a song; often, when they were unsure of their character’s intention in a line, I was able to point to something in the music as a guide.⁶

While researching the scope of Kitt and Yorkey’s work to determine *Next to Normal*’s relationship to it, I discovered that Kitt has significant experience as an orchestrator,⁷ having orchestrated the music for several shows, including *High Fidelity*, *Laugh Whore*, and *American Idiot* (IBDB). His knowledge of an orchestrator’s job signifies that when composing *Next to Normal*, Kitt would have taken care to specify which instruments he envisioned for each song, and the overall tone and timbre of the music; again, every orchestration was written with the intent of aiding the story and the characters.

Additionally, I also found it essential to research the composers who had influenced Kitt and Yorkey. Kitt, for example, notes in his article, “Following Sondheim,” that he always studies classic musical theatre scores before beginning to write a show, as they inspire him to stray from

⁶ See “Score Analysis,” page 13.

⁷ For a musical, a composer writes the music as a series of melodies, harmonies, and chords, usually as a piano-vocal score. It is the job of the orchestrator to take the score and write out parts for each instrument in an orchestra; this gives them a good deal of control over the final sound of a song. Often, they add extra pieces to the music as well.

his usual writing patterns (Kitt 25). Kitt is a huge admirer of Stephen Sondheim,⁸ both for his style of composing and for his approach to musical theatre. In terms of subject matter, *Next to Normal* took a risk in bringing mental illness to musical theatre. Kitt acknowledges, “I’m sure there were those who, early on, questioned whether *Next to Normal* could be told in the musical theatre. But...we [Kitt and Yorkey] were certain that a musical was the best way to do justice to it, for only the songs could adequately encompass the human and emotional dimensions of mental illness. Sondheim’s gritty relentlessness at getting to the heart of deeply personal human stories showed us the way” (Kitt 22). Sondheim paved the way for musicals like *Next to Normal* with shows that often contained subject matter unusual for the stage at the time, such as *Sweeney Todd*.⁹

Furthermore, Sondheim shaped Kitt’s approach to writing musical motifs as well.¹⁰ Kitt noticed Sondheim’s frequent use of motifs in his writing, and how the composer would use them in musicals such as *Into the Woods* to “give the audience a powerful hook to grab onto every time they make an appearance” (Kitt 23).¹¹ As I conducted my music analysis of *Next to Normal*, I found numerous motifs used throughout the show for a similar purposes.¹²

Sondheim also influenced Kitt’s orchestrations. Often, a composer will write a melody and some basic chord progressions and motifs when creating a song, leaving it to the orchestrator to fill in various instrumental lines and determine the “color,” or timbre, of a piece. Sondheim, however, advocated for writing “intricate, multilayered piano parts with melodic lines that the

⁸ Stephen Sondheim is a renowned Broadway composer known for musicals such as *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Company*, among many more.

⁹ *Sweeney Todd* follows the story of “The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” an exiled London barber bent on revenge, who, upon return, proceeds to murder his customers and bake them into pies with the help of his shop assistant.

¹⁰ A motif is a “short thematic kernel. Usually it consists of a few notes in a particular rhythm” (Cohen and Rosenhaus 121).

¹¹ In *Into the Woods*, the bars of music that preceed the title song become a motif, reappearing thematically in different moments of the show. Sondheim uses the motif at the top of the show, and again at the close of the show, to ironically highlight the great changes that the characters have undergone over the course of the musical.

¹² See *The Art of Music Direction in Contemporary Musical Theatre* for examples.

orchestrator will use in the orchestration” (Kitt 23). This ensures that the composer has control over the instrumental interpretation of the piece. Kitt used this strategy when composing *Next to Normal*, which informed me that every aspect of the orchestration was intentionally crafted to aid the actor and audience’s interpretation of the production.¹³ This works in conjunction with Kitt’s use of a form-follows-content approach to composing as well; Sondheim was known to borrow from other styles of music to achieve a particular effect in certain songs.¹⁴ Kitt elaborates on the influence of classic musical theatre and his incorporation of a myriad of styles into his score in a “Sound Off” interview with Broadway World’s Paul Cerasaro, explaining:

“For me to try and make "I Dreamed A Dance" or "There's A World" or "How Could I Ever Forget" into rock songs - those songs come as much out of the classical musical theatre canon, like Sondheim and William Finn and Adam Guettel and on and on and on - those songs are just trying to exist in the exact right dramatic way. It wouldn't be right to shoehorn a rock song in - I would just want to do the moment justice. I think that's why Stephen Sondheim is who he is: he taught us all how to do these things the right way” (Cerasaro 3).

By eschewing a unified form for *Next to Normal*, Kitt is actually serving the story more honestly by delivering the music required for each song to deepen the characters and further the plot, instead of worrying about whether a particular song “fits” the style of the show.

¹³ It is important to note that Kitt enlisted Michael Starobin, known for orchestrating several Sondheim shows, including *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Assassins*, to help him orchestrate *Next to Normal*. Starobin, accustomed to working with Sondheim’s complex compositions, would have honored Kitt’s intentions when orchestrating his score.

¹⁴ In an interview with Tom Kitt, Paul Cerasaro notes that Sondheim utilizes a rap style, for example, for “The Witch’s Rap” in *Into the Woods* because he found it to be the most appropriate form to illustrate the witch’s character and story in that moment (Cerasaro 3).

In my research, I also looked at the workshop process for *Next to Normal*, and songs that were cut along the way before it officially opened on Broadway. In 1998, *Next to Normal* was a short musical about electroconvulsive therapy that Kitt and Yorkey had written for the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop titled *Feeling Electric* (Michels 1). Its focus was the relationship between Diana and her doctor. At that point, the only songs Kitt and Yorkey had written for it that would remain intact in the final production were “I Dreamed A Dance” and “Aftershocks” (Geva Journal). After they received a grant from the Jonathan Larson fund to continue to develop their show, the team eventually staged a production in 2008 at New York’s Second Stage. At this point, Kitt and Yorkey changed their direction for the musical, which up until that point had been a snarky, sardonic look at therapy and mental illness. They cut a comical number in which Diana suffers a breakdown in a Costco, and cut the former title number, “Feeling Electric,” as well. In a *New York Times* interview, *Next to Normal*’s producer, David Stone, explained the decision: “‘It was hard for them to lose it,’ Mr. Stone said of Mr. Yorkey and Mr. Kitt. ‘Feeling Electric’ was not only the title song, but also the founding idea. But that show no longer existed. The creators said about 40 songs were cut during the writing” (Cohen 2).

While the doctor, who sang “Feeling Electric,” had originally had a much larger role in the show, the production had come to center around the Goodmans and their relationships, instead of on the medical specifics of Diana’s therapy, which meant that the song had to go. However, I noticed when listening to a filmed clip of “Feeling Electric” that the lyrics of the song’s refrain, “Plug me in and turn me on/Flip the switch, I’m good as gone” appear in a different form in *Next to Normal*, in Diana and Natalie’s “Wish I Were Here.”

After these significant changes were made, the show had a run in its new form at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. The show had lost a lot of its irony, and was now packing a huge emotional punch. As Yorkey noted in “The Ballad of Kitt and Yorkey,” “There’s a big difference between being 27 and 37. When we were in our 20s, irony was a big thing. Being snarky comes easily when you’re that age and think you’re smarter than everyone else. It’s much more of a risk to open up your heart to something that’s painful” (Getlin 4). Having finally found success, *Next to Normal* opened on Broadway on April 15, 2009 at the Booth Theatre, and went on to win a Tony Award for Best Score and the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama as the eighth musical to ever receive that particular honor. Kitt also received the 2009 Frederick Loewe Award for Dramatic Composition from the Dramatists Guild of America.

Score Analysis

Music

In a musical, characters sing when dialogue alone is no longer enough to express an emotion or objective. Music has the power to elevate tension through song or underscoring, convey subtext, or even contradict a character's words. While the story of *Next to Normal* might not be considered "typical" content for a musical, Kitt and Yorkey found that no form but a musical would do it justice. In an interview with PBS Newshour's "Art Beat," Tom Kitt told Murrey Jacobson,

"I think that this is a subject matter that affects most people. We have very heightened emotions about mental illness. Music in theater is meant to convey those heightened emotions. The saying goes that you sing about something in a musical when emotion becomes so great that you have to. So I felt that a story like this, filled with many heightened emotions, was a natural fit to sing and the only thing was to make sure that I wrote appropriate music for each dramatic moment in the show and not try to overthink it but just go naturally where I feel like Brian's writing is taking the music" (Michels 2).

This knowledge, along with the dramaturgical research I conducted before cast rehearsals began, steered my music direction of the show. As I discuss in "Working With Actors," some music directors prefer to focus solely on the craft of singing when working with a cast.¹⁵ They prefer to work on vocal technique and ensuring every harmony and rhythm is in place while leaving

¹⁵ See "Working With Actors," page 52.

acting interpretation up to the stage director. However, as a music director I have always been invested in how the music of a show affects the interpretation of action. For me, working on acting the song is an integral part of music direction; if we allow the music and underscoring to assist us, we can hugely enhance the action and emotion of a show.

Often, when performers are told to “act the song,” they interpret that to mean fighting the music by speaking lyrics without pitch, and changing the rhythm and melody of songs as they please. They fail to realize that more often than not, the composer has built clues for action into the score. As John Franceschina writes in his book, *Music Theory Through Musical Theatre*:

"The value and liveliness of words is emphasized in acting and musical theatre performance classes, but, too often, in emphasizing the lyrics of a song, the music is disregarded, or treated merely as a subordinate or servant of the words without a life of its own. Students are told to "forget about the music" and to "speak the lyrics" without regard for how or why a particular musical phrase was written, and the result is often a confrontation between dramatic intent and musical necessity -- a conflict that could easily have been avoided had the student and teacher explored the dramatic intent inherent in the actual composition of the song" (Franceschina 2).

Leaning into the music instead opens up a world of acting choices and interpretation, which is something I emphasized as music director of *Next to Normal*.

Next to Normal is unique from many musicals in that it is almost completely sung-through; most of the plot is furthered through song, and the little dialogue that does occur mostly

happens within songs or with underscoring. In this way, its form is closely related to opera, where song and scene blend seamlessly into action. This differs from more classic musical theatre shows, such as *Oklahoma*, for example, where the music is interspersed throughout the show, and does not necessarily further the plot in the same way that a sung-through production would. Since the music is such a prominent element of the show, I found it crucial to examine all facets of the score, including rhythm and melody, song style, meter and tempo, intervals and counterpoint, motifs and chord progression, and underscoring.

Rhythm is one of the most important aspects of music to pay attention to as a music director. As Franceschina writes, “Music is a temporal art, the performance (and perception) of which always occurs during a passage of time” (Franceschina 12). Rhythm is so integral to the music of theatre that most performers are familiar with the old adage, “A wrong note sung at the right time is half right; a right note sung at the wrong time is completely wrong,” by the end of their first performance experience. Rhythm allows composers to play with emotion through song. A staccato¹⁶ rhythm, for example, could indicate a sense of urgency, or excitement, while a legato¹⁷ rhythm could indicate ease or joy. Composers can also play with the rhythm of recurring lines throughout the course of a show to change the meaning behind the line, or indicate a change in action. For example, in Dan’s song, “He’s Not Here,” his line, “He’s not here/He’s not here/Love, I know you know,” is composed of a series of eighth notes followed by quarter notes with fermatas, which gives the impression that Dan is hesitating, struggling to gently approach the situation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Staccato generally means short and sharp. Notes are disconnected from each other. They can be colloquially described as “popcorn-like.”

¹⁷ Legato refers to phrases that are smooth and connected.

¹⁸ “He’s Not Here” is sung by Dan after Diana brings out a birthday cake to celebrate what would have been their son Gabe’s birthday. This is the first time the audience realizes that Gabe, whom they have seen throughout the show, is actually a hallucination, and that the Goodmans’ son died as a baby.

4 DAN: He's not here... he's not here. Love, I know you know.

5 6

Vibes *mp*

Vcl.

Later in the show, Dan sings the same line against in “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.”¹⁹ This time, however, Kitt changes his rhythm to a series of dotted eighth notes.

43 Vamp Until...Until... DR. MADDEN: Until?

44 45 DAN: He's not here...

46

w/Gtr. sim. 3x

pp A^bsus A^b5 A^bsus A^b5 A^b5

L.H. PLAY

w/Bs.

+Vln. *mp* cresc. poco a poco

+Vcl.

126

Piano/Conductor 5. MAKE UP YOUR MIND / CATCH ME I'M FALLING Next to Normal

46 He's not here... Love I know, you know.

47

48 NATALIE: *f* you know.

HENRY: *f* you know.

¹⁹ In “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling,” Diana undergoes hypnosis to treat her depression and bipolar disorder. During the song, Diana wanders through her memories, reliving moments of tension with her family, including Dan.

The syncopation makes Dan's words more emphatic than the straight eighth notes of the earlier iteration, representing his growing frustration with Diana's inability to let go of her grief for her son.

Changes in meter are significant as well, as they give a director clues as to the action of a scene; often, such a shift is prompted by an external force in the scene acting upon the character, as opposed to the meter change being arbitrary. For example, "How Could I Ever Forget" is written in a six-eight meter.²⁰

Poco rubato

DIANA: We were still liv-ing down - town... My black coat thrown o - ver my blue night - gown..You

DAN: It's not a good idea—

Vibes

9 10 11 12

For the most part, the piece follows this melodic progression. However, in measure seventeen, where the rhythm should duplicate that of measure ten, the meter abruptly changes to three-eight for one measure, eliminating most of the rest time in that measure.

²⁰ In "How Could I Ever Forget," Dan and Diana discuss for the first time onstage the circumstances of their son's death. Dan resists Diana at first as she insists they remember, but eventually gives into the memories.

16 More movement ♩ = 144

How could I ev-er for - get? Out - side the morn - ing was cool and wet. He

Gtr.

mp Gb

Gbsus2

Db/F

Kitt wrote the meter in this way so that the actor playing Diana quickly leaps into the next line, and provides a crucial clue to the action of the scene in doing so. Since Kitt has had such significant experience with composition and orchestration, such a meter change could not be arbitrary; it indicates that something has occurred externally in the scene. In our production, I interpreted the change as Dan attempting to interrupt Diana, which makes it necessary for her to jump in and continue the line more quickly than anticipated.

Another example of changing meter occurs in “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,”²¹ which alternates continuously from six-eight to a rarer asymmetric five-eight pattern.²² Since symmetric meters are more intuitive to the ear, a listener would naturally anticipate the six-eight pattern. The earlier arrival of the downbeat in five-eight therefore creates the sensation of tumbling forward, that Natalie is tripping over her words and losing control during the song.

²¹ In this Act I number, Natalie frustratedly vents to Henry about how she lives in the shadow of her late brother, even though he died before she was born.

²² An asymmetric, or irregular, pattern means that the beats of the measure cannot be divided evenly into a conducting pattern. A majority of meters used in musical theatre songs are regular, including six-eight time, which means that six counts of eighth notes are contained in a measure of music. When conducting six-eight, a conductor can evenly divide beats into two sweeping counts of three. In five-eight, on the other hand, the beats would have to be divided into either a two-count pattern of “one-two-three, one-two,” or “one-two, one two three.” Either way, the counts would be asymmetrical, hence the name of the meter.

19 20 21 22

Su-per-boy and the in-vis-i-ble girl... eve-ry-thing a kid ought-a be.

Vln, Vcl *8mb*

(Gtr. cont. *sim*)

f D⁵ C⁵/D D⁵ A⁵/D

w/Bs.

Drs: Cym's col Gtr.

The musical score is for a song in D major, 6/8 time. It features a vocal line, violin and viola (8mb), guitar (continuing from the previous page, *sim*), and piano/bass. The piano part includes chords D⁵, C⁵/D, D⁵, and A⁵/D. The lyrics are: 'Su-per-boy and the in-vis-i-ble girl... eve-ry-thing a kid ought-a be.'

This song marks a stark contrast to Natalie’s earlier solo, “Everybody Else,” which follows a steady four-four rhythm, and represents a dynamic change for Natalie’s character. In “Everybody Else,” she is a straight-laced over-achiever who outlines her meticulous plan for her future and career, and prides herself on her tight control of her life. By the end of “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,” on the other hand, Natalie tries marijuana for the first time, the beginning of her spiral into prescription pill abuse and loss of control over her life. The meter change mirrors this to an extent.

Style of music also plays a significant role in song interpretation, especially for the music of *Next to Normal*, in which song form is so heavily influenced by content. Historically, certain styles of music have been used to signify different emotional states. Waltzes, for example, are traditionally employed to show romance and feelings of love or joy. Kitt, however, uses these historical implications ironically by writing “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I” as a waltz. In this song, Diana describes her relationship with her psychopharmacologist as “an odd romance,” since, as she says, “He knows my deepest secrets/I know his name.” Kitt shows here how one-sided the relationship of doctor and patient is – how Diana is obliged to reveal her most

private thoughts and memories to Doctor Fine, while he reveals nothing but his name and title to her.

The choice of a jazz waltz, specifically, to illustrate the process of medicating a mental illness stretches even further than a riff on romance, however. As noted in my dramaturgical research,²³ Kitt settled on this song form because, “I wanted to desensitize the drugs, almost make it feel like it’s in radio jingle land because I think there is a sense, especially on television...that they do try to desensitize a little bit what they’re selling” (Reesman 14). He crafted a catchy tune that audiences could conceivably exit the theatre humming to deliver a frightening message about the way in which drug industries and modern science can quickly desensitize us to medication. As background voices cheerfully hum doo-wops, Diana lists her reactions to each round of drugs she is given, which include headaches, nausea, blurred vision, loss of appetite, insomnia, and worse. They pleasantly list various side effects of Diana’s medications, which include, “Diarrhea, constipation, nervous laughter, palpitations...” And of course, as the voices gleefully note, “Use may be fatal.” The music purposely detracts from the gravity of their message.

Furthermore, one of the key tenets of jazz as a style is the use of improvisation where performers take turns riffing on a melody, inventing new melodies spontaneously. Interspersed in “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I” are scenes with Natalie and Henry playing the piano together, as Henry teaches Natalie to play jazz music, instead of the rigid classical style she favors. The orchestra pianist is specifically instructed to improvise during this section to underscore the spontaneity of the jazz style:

²³ See Pre-Production Dramaturgical Research, p. 3



At one point, Natalie asks, “It’s just that the thing with jazz is, how do you ever know if you got it right? It’s just making this shit up.” This mirrors Diana’s conversation with Doctor Fine, as he makes yet another adjustment to her medication, saying, “So we’ll try again, and eventually we’ll get it right.” In return, Diana sarcastically notes, “Not a very exact science, is it?” Kitt purposely draws a parallel between the art of jazz improvisation and the science of a psychopharmacologist trying to successfully medicate a patient, without knowing how the individual will react to any given drug. It is not a question of getting it right, but rather of striking out in the dark and hopefully hitting on something successful.

Another musical style is referenced in Diana’s “I Miss The Mountains.” This powerhouse song is written as a folk ballad, a style associated with nature and the wilderness. This aligns closely with the imagery Kitt and Yorkey use to describe Diana’s experience of her bipolar disorder, as she sings, “I miss the mountains/I miss the lonely climb/Wandering through the wilderness/And spending all my time/Where the air is clear/And cuts you like a knife.” Kitt’s use of the folk ballad style enhances Yorkey’s lyrics without distracting the audience: the ballad’s easygoing four-four time signature still allows Diana’s voice to carry the piece.

Immediately after “I Miss The Mountains” comes “It’s Gonna Be Good,” a wild departure from *Next to Normal*’s pop-rock style.²⁴ It is written with elements of a fox-trot, a style more commonly associated with classic musical theatre from before the 1970s. Although “It’s Gonna Be Good” employs cut time, it is typically written in four-four time with an alternating bass line that accentuates the first and third beats of a measure, as shown below.

The musical score for "It's Gonna Be Good" is presented in four staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 10 with the lyrics "It's gon-na be good. Two weeks and it's all work-ing just the". The second staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a bass line with chords E, D, B, E, and C#m. The third staff is the string section (Stgs.), playing a melodic line with a mezzo-forte (mp) dynamic. The fourth staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a bass line with chords E, D, B, E, and C#m.

Its appearance in a contemporary rock musical is both jarring and significant. In *Writing Musical Theater*, Allen Cohen and Steven Rosenhaus explain, "Accompaniments...reflect the times in which they were written...Since the 1970s, fox-trot accompaniments have been increasingly rare. Unless they are used deliberately for comedic or pastiche effect, they sound tired and dated" (Cohen and Rosenhaus 130-131).

²⁴ Dan sings “It’s Gonna Be Good” right after Kitt and Yorkey reveal to the audience that Diana has stopped taking her medication.

This is precisely the case with “It’s Gonna Be Good.” With orchestral instructions that order the musicians to play in a way that is, “Disgustingly happy and perky” (measure 8), the song is meant to sound comically out of place. Dan sings about how well his family life is going as the other characters of the show act as his background singers to a tune that would not be out of place in a 1950s family sitcom.. It is meant to poke fun at the ideal of the “perfect” family, and Dan’s desperation to achieve such normalcy. Dan cheerfully applauds the effects of her medication, saying how, “It’s almost been a month and she’s as happy as a clam,” when in reality Diana is merely going through one of her bipolar manic periods. At one point during this number she lists all of the tasks she has completed for the day, saying, “I disinfected the entire house, rewired the computer, and did some decoupage...Next, I think I’ll retile the roof!” This is a common symptom of mania – extreme bursts of energy and hyper-productivity. The upbeat, peppy music reflects this; in a way, Dan and the other characters are a manifestation of Diana’s mania.

The ending of “It’s Gonna Be Good” finds all of the characters repeating the phrase, “It’s gonna be good” in rapid succession:

The musical score depicts the final moments of the song, where multiple characters join in to sing the phrase "gon-na be good". The score is written for a large ensemble, with parts for Diana, Natalie, Gabe/Henry, and a piano accompaniment. The tempo and dynamics are marked with "cresc. poco a poco" and "poco accel.", indicating a gradual increase in speed and volume. The lyrics "gon-na be good" are repeated by each character in a staggered fashion, creating a rapid succession of the phrase. The piano part features a steady, rhythmic accompaniment with a "B♭sus/C" chord in the left hand. The overall mood is one of manic energy, reflecting the character of Diana.

The song sounds as though it is escaping the grasp of the characters, getting wilder and more over-the-top as it progresses. In this way, Kitt accurately represents mania as a loss of control: Diana cannot control her periods of wild joy and abandon any more than she can control her periods of grief and depression.

Diana sings “I Dreamed A Dance” as she holds the music box that once belonged to Gabe. Therefore, the song is written as a music box-style waltz, delicate and slow. The romantic nature of the style, coupled with poetic lyrics such as, “We spun around a thousand stars/I dreamed a dance with you,” in which Diana fantasizes about sharing a dance with her son, lulls the audience briefly into a state of calm, much needed after the driving “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” that preceded it. However, while on the surface the piece is romantic, Kitt and Yorkey actually use the style to explore a dark symptom of depression. This song is immediately followed by “There’s A World,” which ends with Diana attempting suicide. Diana sings, “I know the night is dying dear...I know the day will dawn,” dreading the moment when she will have to rise again from the romance of her dreams to face yet another day. The desire to sleep, the inability to rise in the morning because the ache of reality is too great, is a common symptom of depression. The tune of “I Dreamed A Dance” is intentionally romantic, as it is meant to illustrate Diana’s headspace at the time, and explore viscerally why the prospect of suicide might appeal to her in that moment. This approach sets *Next to Normal* apart from other pieces of theatre that deal with suicide in that it does not simply condemn the act and move on; instead, it acknowledges why Diana might choose this path. Furthermore, it illustrates that recovery from mental illness is not a simple path; it is an uphill climb, with mountains and valleys, relapses and progress made. Indeed, in the next scene, Doctor Madden explains to a

distraught Dan, who believed her treatments were working, that, “Sometimes patients recover just enough strength to follow through on suicidal impulses, but not enough strength to resist them.”

I also looked at Kitt’s use of intervals in the music composition of *Next to Normal*.²⁵ For example, he employs the “perfect prime” in several cases throughout the score. A perfect prime simply means that the same note is repeated numerous times in a row in a line (hence the reason the interval is referred to as “prime” – there is no pitch distance between the two notes). The perfect prime can be used to emphasize repetition in a phrase and draw attention to specific lyric lines that the composer wishes to stand out. For example, in “You Don’t Know,” Diana argues with Dan as she describes what it is like to live with bipolar disorder. Her lyrics are written in a series of perfect primes: when she demands, “Do you wake up in the morning and need help to lift your head? Do you read obituaries and feel jealous of the dead?” the pitches follow a series of C, then B, then A notes. This format is repeated throughout the rest of the verses.

4

wake up in the morn - ing and need help to lift your head? Do you read o - bit - u - ar - ies and feel

Gtr.

PLAY

mp

w/Drs.

²⁵ Intervals refer to the distance between two music notes. They are named by counting the number of pitches between the two on the diatonic scale. Intervals can be consonant, meaning they sound pleasant and are considered “stable” (not needing resolution), or dissonant, meaning they sound unpleasant and are considered “unstable,” and usually in need of resolution. The quality of interval is also useful in naming and describing them: Perfect intervals are considered the most consonant because of their sound, hence the name. Major intervals generally sound bright and happy, while minor intervals can sound melancholy or sinister. Augmented intervals are major intervals of the same name raised a half step, while diminished intervals are minor intervals lowered a half step (Franceschina 75-92).

Since the notes do not vary much, the audience instead hones in on Diana's lyrics. The musical effect is that of Diana gritting her teeth, as though she is trapped in a pressure cooker and trying not to lose her temper during the verses.

Kitt also uses the perfect prime frequently in "Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I'm Falling." Gabe first sings, "Catch me I'm falling...catch me I'm falling," on a repeated A flat note.

The musical score is for a section of the song "Catch Me I'm Falling". It features three staves: a vocal line for Gabe, a piano accompaniment, and a guitar/bass line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 8/8. The score begins at measure 57, marked "Ghostly, sad". Gabe's vocal line starts with the lyrics "Catch me I'm falling..." on a repeated A-flat note. The piano accompaniment includes a "Syn: Dreaming Box" and a "Vcl." part. The guitar/bass line includes a "p" dynamic marking, a "+Syn. 8va" marking, and a "(Bs. out)" marking. The score continues through measures 58 and 59, with Gabe's vocal line repeating the phrase "Catch me I'm falling..." and then "Fast-er than an - y - one should...". The piano accompaniment and guitar/bass line continue with chords and single notes. The score ends with a "(Bs. out)" marking.

The repetition of note and lyric here forms an arrest in the music: the audience is drawn back to this lyrical motif, which will resurface multiple times throughout the song and the rest of the show. The following line, "faster than anyone should," is written on a descending line, which illustrates the sentiment of rapidly falling expressed in the lyrics, before returning to the perfect prime again for "catch me I'm falling" in the next measure.

The perfect prime appears in “Aftershocks”²⁶ as well, where a majority of the song is sung on these repeated intervals:

The musical score is for the song "Aftershocks" and is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo is marked "Allegro, urgent" with a metronome marking of 124. The score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, with lyrics written below it. The lyrics are: "They've managed to get rid of me— re - turn me to the grave.—". The vocal line is marked with a "2" above the first measure, a "3" above the second measure, and a "4" above the third measure. The middle staff is for the guitar, with a "Stgs." marking above the first measure and a "mp" marking below the first measure. The bottom staff is for the piano, with a "+Gtr. o's" marking above the first measure and a "mp" marking below the first measure. The score is divided into four measures by bar lines.

As shown above, Gabe’s lyrics are written on a repeated C sharp, occasionally moving to a D, only to quickly return to the C sharp. In this case, the perfect prime actually highlights the few sections of music where the notes do change more dramatically; the tempo slows down as well to exaggerate this change. Kitt does this to emphasize the lyrics there: “They’ve driven out the demons and they’ve earned you this reprieve./The memories are gone./The aftershocks live on./But with nothing to remember,/Is there nothing left to grieve?”

²⁶ “Aftershocks” sees Gabe’s first appearance after Diana undergoes electroconvulsive therapy (E.C.T.) to eradicate his ghost from her memories. In the song, he sings of the merits and hazards of the treatment, and implies that it is not a proper cure for bipolar disorder: “They cut away the cancer/But forgot to fill the hole/Removed me from your memory/I’m still there in your soul.” By the end of the song, the audience is forewarned that Diana will likely relapse.

52 *hang-ing from your sleeve. They've driv-en out the de - mons and they've earned you this re-prieve: The*

53 *rit.*

54 *(Stgs. out)*

55 *Colla voce*

56 *mem-o-ries are gone. The af-ter-shocks live on. But with noth-ing to re-mem-ber, is there noth-ing left to*

57 *(Vib. out)*

58 *Solo mp*

(Gtr, Bs. out)

f Dm6/F

p F#m

+Gtr.

mf Bm7

+Bs. 8vb

These lyrics are crucial because they tell a very different story from “Better Than Before,” the song that precedes “Aftershocks,” in which Dan and Diana resolve to improve their family life. “Better Than Before” ends on a hopeful note; Diana seems to be improving medically, even though she is still suffering from memory loss thanks to her E.C.T. treatment, and Dan is relieved that Gabe no longer seems to haunt their family. In these few lines of “Aftershocks,” however, Gabe destroys that hope. He calls her E.C.T. - induced memory loss a “reprieve,” rather than a permanent fix for her problems. He then implies that the loss of her memory is not a

feasible cure after all, as perhaps her mental illness does not require the memory to continue manifesting itself: “With nothing to remember/Is there nothing left to grieve?”

Kitt also uses the perfect prime in a unique way during Dan’s “He’s Not Here.” During the song, the melodic pattern of a falling major third interval followed by a rising major second is repeated throughout the song numerous times:

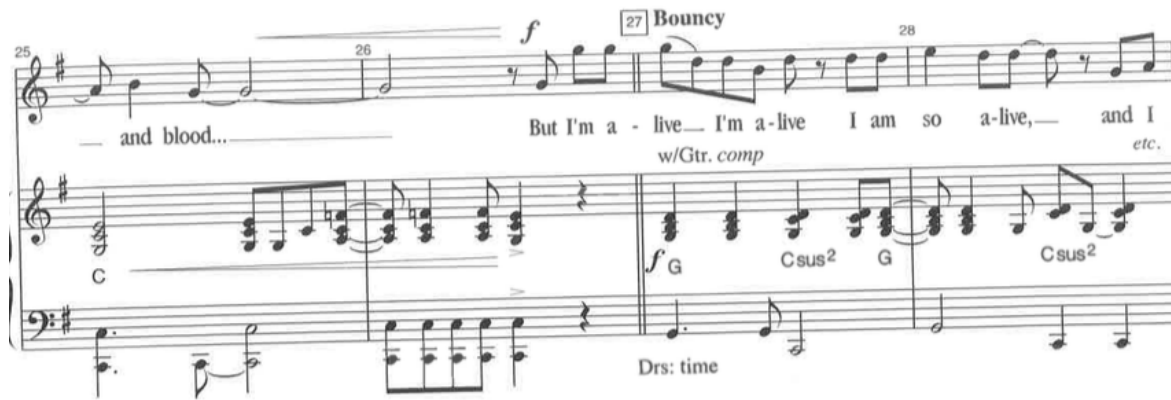
The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is for the vocal part, labeled 'DAN:'. It contains two phrases of music. The first phrase, measures 4-5, has the lyrics 'He's not here... he's not here.' The second phrase, measures 7-8, has the lyrics 'Do you feel he's still real?'. The piano accompaniment is shown in the bottom two staves. It features a repeating melodic pattern of a falling major third followed by a rising major second. The score is marked with a 'v' at the end of the first phrase and 'mp' (mezzo-piano) for the piano part.

Kitt, however, changes this pattern on the final line of the song. Although Dan repeats the line, “He’s not here,” instead of the “here” being lifted by a major second, it remains on the perfect prime with “not.” The song ends without the expected resolution, making the phrase sounds less definitive, which implies that Gabe is not, perhaps, actually gone after all.

Another interval Kitt uses for emphasis in his score is the octave, which involves jumping from one note to the same note eight steps away. This consonant leap “produces the musical dramatic effect of reaching out with the comfort and stability of tonal familiarity” (Franceschina 78). It is a way to draw the audience into the character’s desires.²⁷ Kitt writes numerous octaves

²⁷ Claude-Michel Schönberg, for example, uses the perfect octave in *Les Misérables*’ “Bring Him Home.” In this case, Jean Valjean begs God to bring his adopted daughter’s love, Marius, home safely from the barricades. His

into Gabe's "I'm Alive." The song starts in a quiet, almost seductive place, but on the chorus leaps dramatically up the octave and continues at a more driving pace:



This leap emphasizes the phrase, "But I'm alive," and pinpoints Gabe's overarching desire in the show, which is to be remembered so that his manifestation can live on.

Motifs also play an integral role in music interpretation. A motif, defined by Cohen and Rosenhaus in *Writing Musical Theater* as "a short thematic kernel" (Cohen and Rosenhaus 121), consists of a measure or few measures of notes combined in a certain way. Composers use it for a variety of purposes, as its repetition sets up a musical expectation that can be exploited either by leaning into the expectation or by contradicting it. Motifs can appear at any point in a show, and help establish character, as particular themes are often tied to individual characters.

A recurring motif in *Next to Normal* is set up in the prelude, entitled "Night." The piano line repeats every measure in the same pattern of notes and rhythm for the rest of the prelude.

pleas escalate musically in intervals until the climax of the song, in which Valjean makes his strongest statement on a perfect octave.



The “Night” motif resurfaces again at numerous points in the score. For example, it plays in the underscoring between “Perfect For You” and “I Miss The Mountains,” and again in the underscoring of “Wish I Were Here.” “Night” ties the Goodman family to their past, and the tragedies that lie there. In the prelude, the audience meets Gabe, the ultimate symbol of the family’s various griefs and mental illnesses, for the first time. When it plays before “I Miss The Mountains,” it underscores the moment during which Diana reflects on her decision to marry Dan due to her unplanned pregnancy, and compares it to her inability now to guide Natalie through her own first love with Henry. This moment leads to Diana’s decision to stop taking her medication. In “Wish I Were Here,” it plays as Dan collects Diana from her first E.C.T. treatment, in which a large portion of her long-term memory was eradicated. This moment is a catalyst for the final disintegration of Dan and Diana’s relationship in the show, where Dan’s desire to erase Gabe from their past has finally gone too far.

“Night” appears one last time in *Next to Normal*’s finale, significantly titled “Light,” with one major change:

17 **DAN:** 18 19 20

Night af - ter night we'd sit and wait for the morn - ing light.

mp C7no3 Vcl. C7sus Toms C7no3 C7sus Toms

+Crash +Crash

21 22 23 24

But we've wait - ed far too long for all that's wrong to be made right.

Vcl. (Syn. out) C7no3 F#sus2/A F#sus2 Gsus

+Crash +Cym. roll

It underscores Dan's lyrics as he sings of waiting "night after night" for a beacon of hope in his family's fight for normalcy. However, when he says, "But we've waited far too long/For all that's wrong/To be made right," though the motif rhythm stays the same, the chords change from a mysterious-sounding C7 into a hopeful-sounding F#sus2. This signifies a crucial turning point in Dan's character; at this point, he stops trying to repress the memory of Gabe and instead goes to seek help for his own grief. A similar progression occurs under Diana's verse in "Light," in which she sings, "Day after day/Wishing all our cares away...Some ghosts are never gone/But we go on/We still go on," and during Natalie's final scene with Henry. Therefore, although the show does not end in a neatly packaged bow, as Diana has left Dan to live with her parents and the

audience is left with some uncertainty as to whether the family will truly be able to heal from the events of the show, this motif change in “Light” gives a clue that a change has occurred for the better in their lives. The show therefore ends on a hopeful night, having transitioned from “Night” into “Light.”

Motifs, as briefly touched on above, also play a crucial role in “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.” During this number, Diana undergoes hypnosis to treat her bipolar disorder, and different character themes resurface to represent her reliving these memories. The motifs represent moments in which Diana’s illness has hurt her family: Dan sings “He’s not here,” while Natalie sings her theme from “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,” “She’s not there,” which represents not just Natalie’s feelings of invisibility in her family, but also all of the times Diana could not attend Natalie’s recitals and other important events growing up because of her illness. Diana is forced to confront how bipolar disorder has affected her family.

The underscoring of “Everything Else” also becomes a crucial motif in “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.” During the song, Natalie must give her piano recital to get a scholarship for college by playing this underscoring. However, unlike in the original song, she quickly makes major errors while playing:

95 96 97

Solo
mp

(Natalie makes a big mistake)

G.P.

family.

GO

She follows these mistakes by railing against how “rigid and structured” classical playing is, and how “There’s no room for improvisation.” This musically represents Natalie’s spiral from over-achieving, straight-A perfectionist into the Natalie we meet at the start of Act II, who is out clubbing on quite a few drugs on a Tuesday night.

Whether we realize it or not, Western music has conditioned us to anticipate certain chord progressions over others.²⁸ It has also conditioned us to have certain expectations when we hear chord progressions; some come with emotions attached to them, while others can feel either unresolved or complete. When writing music, composers can either work with these expectations or subvert them, depending on their intention for the piece.

“There’s A World,” for example, is a curious piece in that it feels like it should naturally fall at the close of Act I. At the end of this song, Gabe leads Diana offstage, and we hear from Doctor Madden that she has attempted suicide. The ending chords of the piece have a finality to them, in that they end in a predicted B flat major without variation, and without a transition for a following piece, unlike the majority of the preceding songs, which either move fluidly into the next number, end in an unresolved chord, or are cut off abruptly by dialogue.

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "world where we can be free Come with me." The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *pp*. There are also performance instructions like "(Glock out)" and "+Cym. scrape". The score ends with a double bar line and the text "Segue to #15 'E.C.T.'".

²⁸ A quick perusal of popular music shows how ubiquitous the chord progression “I-V-vi-IV” is, for example. A small selection of famous songs that follow this progression include Green Day’s “21 Guns,” OneRepublic’s “Apologize,” Adele’s “Someone Like You,” Beyoncé’s “If I Were A Boy,” and A-ha’s “Take On Me,” to name a few.

All of this seems to point to an Act I finale number, in which the audience must wait until after intermission to discover Diana's fate. Instead, Kitt and Yorkey move swiftly onto the next scene, which features Dan and Doctor Madden discussing treatment options for Diana going forward. The reason for this is that Kitt and Yorkey are largely unconcerned with leaving the audience in suspense: Diana's suicide attempt is not written to be a cliffhanger, a cheap trick for shock value. Instead, they examine how its effect on the Goodmans, and how it shifts the relationships within the family. In this way, Kitt subverts audience expectations and enhances the story in doing so.

"I've Been" finds Dan near his breaking point after Diana's suicide attempt. Alone in his house, he recounts with frustration how he has tried to help his wife through her illness, how he has pushed aside his own fears and problems in order to be there for her, and how it has still not been enough. The verses largely follow a repetitive chord pattern of F minor seven, to D flat with a sustained second, to A flat, to E flat, with a similar progression in the chorus, standard fare for a contemporary pop-rock song. However, there are two key spots in which the music deviates from this pattern. The first comes immediately after Dan sings, "And whenever she goes flying, I keep my feet right on the ground. Oh, now I need a lift and there's no one around." At this point, violins enter and the music shifts into a soaring, lifted pattern of A flat major to G flat major, while Gabe enters to echo Dan's vocals. This melodically lifted portion of the song represents escapism, Dan's desire to be free from his role as caregiver, but unwillingness to lose his wife. It is important to note that this is the first time Gabe enters a scene with Dan without Diana being present. Gabe, a reflection of each character's internal struggles and mental illnesses, appears at one of Dan's lowest points. This indicates that Diana is not the only one struggling with demons since their son's death.

The second musical shift occurs in the last four measures of the song, where the chord progression shifts to an E flat major with D in the base, followed by a D flat sustained second. This repeats twice at a slow tempo, and piano and violin dominate, while the guitar rhythm that had previously driven the song fades away. This is a stark deviation from what came before, and serves to highlight a shift in lyrics as well: For the entire song, Dan sings about how, “I’ve been...” and everything that he has experienced while helping Diana. However, as the music shifts, Dan sings, “I’ve never been alone. I could never be alone.”

Piano/Conductor

11. I'VE BEEN

Next to Normal

The change in music catches the audience's ear and forces them to tune into Dan's words as he turns from what he has been to what he has never been, which reveals a crucial trait of his character: Dan grasps onto his family and focuses on Diana's problems because he dreads being alone with his own thoughts. If Diana leaves him, he will have to confront his own demons.

Music can also emphasize and underscore a character's words. For example, in "Perfect For You," Henry works to convince Natalie of why she should date him. The opening verse is dark, chromatic, and intense, as Henry describes everything that is wrong with our planet, and how, "The world is at war, filled with death and disease/We dance on the edge of destruction."

The image displays a musical score for the song "Perfect For You." It features three staves: a vocal line (treble clef), a piano accompaniment (bass clef), and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The key signature is D major (two sharps). The tempo/mood is marked "p." (piano). The score is divided into measures 13, 14, and 15. The lyrics are: "plan - et is poi - soned, the o - ceans, the air... a - round and be - neath... and a - bove". The piano accompaniment in the bottom staff uses a series of chromatic half-steps in the bass line, with chords labeled C#m7 and C#m7(6). The vocal line in the top staff is also chromatic, with a wavy line indicating a melodic flourish. The piano accompaniment in the middle staff is a simple bass line.

The muddled nature and chromatic half-steps lend urgency to Henry's message, as he observes the state of the planet. However, as soon as Henry reaches the refrain, in which he sings of how he could be perfect for Natalie, the music resolves to a gentle D major key.

35 **36 Tenderly** 37 38

Per - fect for you... I could be per - fect for you.

Gtr, Bs OUT

p *sub.*

w/Cym's

mp DMaj11

F#m/C# F#m⁶/C# F#m⁷/C#

This musical score for 'Tenderly' spans measures 35 to 38. It features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'Per - fect for you...' and 'I could be per - fect for you.' The guitar and bass parts are indicated as 'Gtr, Bs OUT'. The piano accompaniment includes chords F#m/C#, F#m⁶/C#, and F#m⁷/C# in the left hand, and a melody in the right hand with a 'w/Cym's' (with cymbals) effect. The tempo/mood is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and the chord is 'DMaj11'.

This suggests to the audience that Henry might actually be perfect for Natalie, and that being in a relationship with him might help keep her complicated family problems at bay.

Conversely, music can also contradict a character's words. For example, in "There's A World," Gabe sings, "There's a world I know/A place we can go/Where the pain will go away/There's a world where the sun shines each day." These lyrics sound hopeful, with positive and happy imagery. However, the underscoring tells a different story.

3 **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10**

SLOW, GHOSTLY, SOMEBWAT REE

(GABE)

world... There's a world I know. A place we can go where the pain will go a-way—

SOLO

there's a world where the sun shines each day. There's a

This musical score for 'There's A World' spans measures 3 to 10. It features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'world... There's a world I know. A place we can go where the pain will go a-way—' and 'there's a world where the sun shines each day. There's a'. The piano accompaniment includes a 'SOLO' section in the left hand. The tempo/mood is marked 'SLOW, GHOSTLY, SOMEBWAT REE'.

The chords here are minor and haunting; the D minor that ends the phrase, “There’s a world where the sun shines each day,” suggests that the world Gabe describes is perhaps not the haven he paints it to be.

Kitt uses a similar technique at the end of “Better Than Before,” when Natalie, Dan, and Diana sing in G major, “Gonna get us back to better than before...make everything much better than before...better than before.” At the very end of the song, the anticipated chord is a G major, which would resolve the chord progression and finish the song cleanly. Instead, the music transitions into F minor, which clashes ominously with the harmony that the three characters hold over it. The effect is unsettling, implying that things will not actually become “better than before,” at least not right away. This implication is confirmed as the song leads directly into “Aftershocks.”

Natalie and Henry’s “Hey #1” and “Hey #2” end in an equally unresolved fashion as well. In the closing line of both numbers, Natalie, whose relationship with Henry is on the rocks, tells him, “Goodbye, Henry.” While this line seems final, and lyrically appears to signify the end of their relationship, at the last second, Natalie’s melody lifts up a step.

Expressive

45 me. 46 NATALIE: 47 *poco rit.* 48 *A tempo* 49 50 HENRY: Natalie. Natalie, wait up. *poco rit.*

Good-bye Hen - ry.

Vln. + Vcl. *p* Vcl.

Cym. (roll) *mp* Fm7(add4) Bb7sus4 *p* Eb7sus2/G Eb6(add2)/G EbMa7sus/G

Gtr. Bs. (tacet)

Attacca #22 Seconds and Years

226

As a result, the chord transforms into one that requires resolution, which does not occur in the music here. This gives the audience hope that Natalie's and Henry's relationship is not over, after all.

Music can create irony in a song, as well. In "Seconds And Years," for example, the cheerful melody and chords belie the tense conversation occurring over them. As Doctor Madden tries to reassure Dan and Diana that memory loss is normal after receiving E.C.T., Dan responds with, "I couldn't give a flying fuck what's normal/We haven't had a normal day in years." The cheery melody his words are set to, and the bright chords underneath, add humor to the line, as they are so incongruous to what Dan is saying.

A darker example of irony occurs in "It's Gonna Be Good (Reprise)."²⁹ Dan sings the same melodic line from the initial iteration of the song, saying, "It's gonna be fine/It's gonna be fine...It's gonna be good you'll see." However, the chords underneath are now dissonant, and clash with the melody.

The image displays a musical score for the song "It's Gonna Be Good (Reprise)". It features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and piano accompaniment on two staves below. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes lyrics and dynamic markings.

Lyrics:

21 ——— 22 It's gon-na be good you'll see. 23 was his name? 24 It's gon-na be good you'll see. 25 was his name? It's

Dynamic Markings:

- 22: *p sub.*
- 23: *f*
- 24: *p*
- 25: *f*

The piano accompaniment consists of chords and single notes, with dynamic markings *sub. p*, *f*, *p*, and *f* corresponding to the vocal line's dynamics.

²⁹ Taking place immediately after "How Could I Ever Forget," in which Diana and Dan recall their son's death, this reprise finds Dan struggling to maintain control of the situation before destroying Gabe's music box in a fit of rage.

The music contradicts Dan's words even as he speaks them; there is no doubt in the audience's minds that things will certainly not be "good" after this song.

Another technique Kitt uses in the score of *Next to Normal* is counterpoint, which occurs when two different melodies are woven together, so that two characters are singing different things at the same time.³⁰ Counterpoint can set up comparisons between different characters and moments, or increase urgency in a scene.³¹ For example, Dan and Diana sing counterpoint to each other in "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I," both reprising earlier vocal lines from the song.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I" from the musical *Next to Normal*. The score is written for two vocal parts, Dan and Diana, and includes piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score is divided into two systems, with measures 222-227 in the first system and measures 228-233 in the second system. The vocal parts are written in treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is written in bass clef. The lyrics are as follows:

222 (DAN) old. 223 DIANA: And though he'll nev - er hold me 224 he'll 225 226 227

228 al - ways take my calls. 229 It's tru - ly like he 230 231 232 233

sex was sim - ply in - spired. Now there's no sex, she's de-pressed,

The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (mp, mf, pp), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (e.g., "w/Vln.", "w/Gtr. p - light and feathery Ebm7", "w/light cym's", "w/light cym's"). The piano accompaniment features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some chords and arpeggios. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves, and the measure numbers are indicated at the beginning of each line.

³⁰ This is separate from harmony, in which the same melody is split into multiple notes and parts.

³¹ A famous example of counterpoint lies in "A Boy Like That" from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*. In this piece, Anita furiously tells Maria why she cannot stay with Tony on a vocal line that is harsh, rhythmic, and staccato. Maria then begins to sing over that line on a soaring, lyrical counterpoint as she confesses that she still loves him. The contrast between the two parts heightens the emotion and drama of the scene (Franceschina 194).

The pairing of these particular lines sets up a curious comparison. Dan sings about the deterioration of his and Diana's sexual and physical relationship, saying, "And she was wicked and wired./The sex was simply inspired./Now there's no sex, she's depressed,/And me I'm just tired." Meanwhile, Diana sings about the deterioration of her and Dan's emotional relationship, saying of her psychopharmacologist, "And though he'll never hold me,/He'll always take my calls..." She implies that although she is not sexually intimate with her psychopharmacologist, he listens to her far more than Dan does. This is an early warning that Dan and Diana's relationship is unhealthy, and that the two prioritize different things in their marriage.

Kitt further explores Dan and Diana's relationship by using music to illustrate Dan's attempts to create a normal life for his family by incessantly cutting Diana off, shutting her down, and controlling her. For example, at the end of Diana's "Didn't I See This Movie?" there is an abrupt transition into Dan's "A Light In The Dark" that cuts her off mid-sentence:

83 (ad lib...) 84 85 *ritard*

out. Synth, Vcl. (out) I'm walk - ing +Cym. roll

A E 3 3 3 3 A

w/Bs. Drum fill J

Segue to #18
Light In The Dark

107

Instead of finishing her sentence, "I'm walking out," the music immediately jumps to the opening chords of "A Light In The Dark." The music reflects what occurs in the scene, where Dan convinces Diana, who is prepared to leave her doctor instead of receiving E.C.T., to undergo

treatment for it, against her initial desires. The music illustrates how Dan takes control of the situation and makes Diana's decisions for her.

This happens again in "Better Than Before," while Diana and Natalie share a brief moment of connection as they reflect on their troubled relationship. Dan leaps into the moment, singing, "You're getting it/You've got it, Di/Hooray!" The music aids Dan in this intrusion; the key changes abruptly from B to G major in this moment, effectively cutting Diana off again and putting Dan back in control of the situation.

These are only a few examples of the many ways in which Tom Kitt used music to create character and action in *Next to Normal*. His detailed score added a depth to the show that gave me many avenues of expression to explore with my actors. Kitt's work also gave me a comprehensive understanding of the various ways in which music can be used to generate emotion, further the plot, and complicate character, a lesson that I will carry forward in my future music directing.

Lyrics

Lyrics are, of course, another major component of interpreting the music of *Next to Normal*. Just as Kitt wrote musical motifs into the score, Yorkey wrote lyrical metaphors and used recurring images. Prevalent metaphors I found central to the show include ones that allude to climbing, falling, and flying, as they pertain to mental illness and the Goodmans' family dynamic.

In "I Miss The Mountains," Diana reminisces on the highs and lows of living with bipolar disorder before she began taking medication, and realizes that she actually misses them when compared with the cool neutrality of her drug-induced calm. The song's journey leads to her dumping out her pills and going off her medication, a catalyst for the proceeding events of the show. In the opening line of this piece, Diana sings wistfully, "There was a time when I flew higher/Was a time the wild girl running free/ Would be me" (m. 2-6). She sings of how she misses the hills and valleys of her illness, "all the climbing/All the falling" m. 30), and that she is willing to pay the price of the pain in order to feel alive again.

Curiously, the same traits that Diana dismisses as a disingenuous way of living, Dan prizes. Diana notes that while on medication, "My mind is somewhere hazy/My feet are on the ground...Everything is perfect/Nothing's real" (m. 40-42). She despises being stuck on the ground when she so strongly remembers how good it felt to fly. Meanwhile, Dan echoes this phrase in "I've Been," frustratedly singing, "And whenever she goes flying/I keep my feet right on the ground." While Diana at this point sees being "on the ground" as boring, Dan sees it as a source of stability, and necessary to keep his family together.

This metaphor continues in "Superboy And The Invisible Girl." Frustrated at being ignored by her family, Natalie sings of how her late brother is viewed as the perfect son, a

“superboy,” while she is rendered invisible by his memory, saying, “I wish I could fly/And magically appear and disappear./I wish I could fly/I’d fly far away from here.” When she expresses this desire, her metaphor is twofold. It connects to this piece’s imagery of a superhero, and Natalie’s desire to be viewed in the same way that her brother is, as a model child, but it also relates to the description of Diana’s illness as “flying.” In “I Miss The Mountains,” Diana longs for the highs and lows she experienced before receiving medication for her bipolar disorder, saying, “There was a time when I flew higher.” Later, in “I’ve Been,” Dan explains how he remains grounded during Diana’s bouts of delusion and manic episodes, saying, “Whenever she goes flying, I keep my feet right on the ground.” This ascension is associated with Diana acting selfishly, of acting without a worry of how doing so will affect her family. So, when Natalie sings of wanting to fly, she is expressing not only her desire to escape from a family that cannot provide her with the support she desires, but her desire to act selfishly for once as well, instead of constantly having to center her life around her mother’s episodes. This sentiment is actualized when she agrees to try marijuana for the first time at the end of this song, leading to her “flying” for a good portion of the show afterwards.

In “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling,” the Goodmans sing, “Catch me I’m falling/Please hear me calling/Catch me before it’s too late,” representing their loss of control over their respective lives and their relationships to each other. These lyrics contrast sharply with the reprise of this song, in which Diana chooses to leave Doctor Madden in order to pursue a form of self-sufficiency and support. Here, she sings, “Watch me I’m falling/Maybe the falling/Isn’t so bad after all./Watch me I’m falling./Watch me I’m flying./Somehow surviving.” While falling is a passive act, flying implies agency, which signifies a huge change in Diana’s character. For much of *Next to Normal*, she is a passive character, letting Dan shepherd her from

treatment to treatment, and doing as her therapists say. Here, however, she makes the decision to take back control of her life.

Outside References

Throughout the score of *Next to Normal*, Kitt and Yorkey also reference numerous outside sources, both musically and lyrically. This is common for musicals, as many pay homage to their theatrical history through self-referential jokes and commentary. Some of these references are to other musicals, while in other places reference is made to works of literature or famous films. These references are more than just sly moments slipped in by Kitt and Yorkey for clever theatre-goers to catch, however; each serves a unique purpose to further the story.

In “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” commercial-like voices list all of the drugs Diana has tried over sixteen years of medicating her illness, singing, “Zoloft and Paxil and Buspar and Xanax, Depakote, Klonopin, Ambien, Prozac. Ativan calms me when I see the bills; these are a few of my favorite pills.” This is a nod to the iconic Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Sound of Music* number, “My Favorite Things,” in which Maria lists all of the bright cheerful things she thinks of, such as, “Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,” so that, “When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I’m feeling sad, I simply remember my favorite things and then I don’t feel so bad” (Rodgers and Hammerstein). In *The Sound of Music*, these pleasant images ward off Maria’s negative emotions and troubling thoughts; in *Next to Normal*, pills serve the same purpose. The allusion is a tactic Kitt and Yorkey use to normalize the medication of mental illness. By showing medication prescribed by a therapist as a modern equivalent of how Maria treats her fears, they transform pills from something taboo into a normal part of some people’s lives.

In “Everything Else,” Natalie professes her love for Mozart’s works. The accompaniment of the song mimics Mozart’s sonatas, precise and clear in tone.

Classical Sonata
Allegro

(Natalie is playing piano in a school practice room)

1 2 3 4

mp
w/stacc.
Vln/Vla.

arco
Bass

Natalie plays while she sings, noting that, “Mozart was crazy...but his music’s not crazy. It’s balanced, it’s nimble, it’s crystalline clear.” The choice Kitt and Yorkey make to pair Natalie with Mozart, making the reference in both the music and lyrics of the score, is significant: Certain classical composers, like Chopin, for example, allow the performer to take certain liberties with the tempo and expression of their pieces. With Mozart, however, the pianist must play the piece exactly how it is written on the page; every crescendo, every ritardando is precisely notated so that there will be no deviation from one performance to another. Natalie, whose home life is unpredictable from day to day, craves stability, and relishes how closely the piece controls her.

At measure 33, however, there is a huge shift in the music through measure 48, as the rhythm transitions from a steady quarter note beat to a contemporary pulsing dotted quarter note beat.

31 32 33 Flowing 34

Eve - ry - thing else goes a - way. And you play 'til it's per - fect, you pay 'til you ache, you

Vln. *mp*

mf

w/Vcl. (sust.)

Natalie sings: “And you play ‘til it’s perfect, you play ‘til you ache. You play ‘till the strings or your fingernails break, so you’ll rock that recital and get into Yale, and you won’t feel so sick, and you won’t look so pale. And you’ve got your full ride and your early admit, and you’re done with this school and with all of this shit. And you graduate early, you’re gone as of May, and there’s nothing your paranoid parents can say.” These lyrics, set to this driving rhythm, give the sensation of Natalie tumbling forward in space. The break from Mozart’s classical style symbolizes a loss of control, as Natalie veers from rehearsing her piece into pushing back against the pressures she juggles as a member of the Goodman family. In fact, this sets up a key dichotomy of Natalie: she lives a controlled, routine life, but actually fights against her own nature to do so. This pattern bubbles to the surface throughout the rest of *Next to Normal*.

In “Didn’t I See This Movie?” Diana references numerous poets and pieces of media as Doctor Madden encourages her to undergo E.C.T. First, she demands to know, “Didn’t I see this movie/With McMurphy and the nurse/That hospital was heavy/But this cuckoo’s nest is worse,” referencing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, in which the main character receives a lobotomy and is rendered a vegetable. She also makes reference to Sylvia Plath, the acclaimed poet and author of *The Bell Jar* who committed suicide after struggling with therapy and mental illness for

years, and to Frances Farmer, the actress committed to a mental hospital after struggling with various mental disorders.

The reason for these references is twofold. First, it illustrates Diana's fear of undergoing E.C.T. She does not see herself as crazy, or dangerous, or deserving of receiving shock treatment to her brain, and is terrified of the potential side effects of the treatment. Secondly, the references acknowledge that the only basis much of the general public has for knowledge of treatment for mental illness is what they have seen in movies or read about in famous cases. Of course, this is not an accurate representation of what it is like to live with and treat mental illness; Kitt and Yorkey openly examine sensationalized cases in this song to force the audience to look at the bias surrounding such illnesses and treatments.

Music Directing *Next to Normal*:

The Process and Production at Bucknell University

Working With Actors

Before entering the rehearsal period, I conducted research on whether certain roles in the original production of *Next to Normal* had been written with specific actors in mind. In terms of approaching each role with my actors, it was vital to know the type of voice the composer envisioned for each role. While my goal was never to recreate a specific sound or interpretation, the knowledge came in handy in other ways. For example, Kitt worked closely with Aaron Tveit, the actor who originated the role of Gabe on Broadway, while finessing the show's music. In his "Sound Off" interview, he says, "The thing about Aaron's character is that I always wanted that character to be a true tenor and to have a boy's-sounding voice in an adult body, and Aaron has this uncanny instrument where his voice doesn't break - he actually wants things written higher for him!" (Cerasaro 2) Understanding that many of Gabe's songs were modified to fit Tveit's unusually high tenor voice allowed me to help Brendan Trybus, playing Gabe in our production, work safely to hit some of those high notes, and gave me leave to melodically modify certain lines that were written in too strenuous a place for Brendan's voice. Kitt acknowledged as well in the same interview that he always had Alice Ripley's voice in mind for the role of Diana while writing *Next to Normal*. Ripley's voice is naturally raw and fragile, which lends itself well to the emotionally intense songs that Diana performs; I worked with Mukta Phatak, the actress playing Diana in our production, to capture the intensity required of Diana in her own vocal style, so that she focused on the character rather than on the voice that originated the role.

One of the first notes I gave the *Next to Normal* ensemble at the start of the rehearsal process was that in contemporary musical theatre, the music is less about singing and more about acting on a pitch.³² Acting on a pitch differs from merely singing in a variety of ways. In popular music, for example, vocalists work to sing as impressively as possible and show off range and

³² See Appendix 8

vocal capabilities. Performers might add riffs³³ and physical gestures that have little to do with the song's narrative. While some musicians do sing more “storyteller”-based songs, most popular music does not create a dynamic arc for characters, or further their development in the way musical theatre pieces do. In *Next to Normal*, on the other hand, the actors sing to further the show in some way, be it through plot or character development. Therefore, everything in the actors' performances must aid their purpose. This means that any changes an actor makes to the melodic line must be justified by an acting intention; it does not matter how impressive a high note or riff is if it does not aid the character or plot in some way. In fact, excessive alteration and ornamentation of the score can actually detract from the emotion and objective of the song. For example, in Diana's “Didn't I See This Movie?” there is a measure towards the end of the song in which Kitt instructs the actor to ad lib:

The image shows a musical score for measures 83, 84, and 85 of the song "Didn't I See This Movie?" from the musical *Next to Normal*. The score is written for a vocal line (treble clef) and piano accompaniment (grand staff). Measure 83 begins with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. The vocal line starts with a rest, followed by a melodic phrase. Measure 84 continues the melodic line, with a bracket indicating an "ad lib..." section. The piano accompaniment features a bass line with notes A and E, and a drum fill indicated by a dashed line. Measure 85 shows the vocal line ending with the lyrics "I'm walk - ing" and a "ritard" marking. The piano accompaniment includes a "Drum fill" and a "Segue to #18 Light In The Dark" instruction. The score is marked with "out." and "Synth, Vcl. (out)" for the vocal line, and "w/Bs." for the piano accompaniment.

This is highly unusual for musical theatre: composers rarely give actors the freedom to interpret part of the music for themselves. In doing so, Kitt trusted the actress and music director to interpret the score themselves, and to make honest acting choices through it. A massive advantage of an ad lib is that, theoretically, the actress playing Diana could improvise it differently every night, according to what her emotional state required in each individual

³³ A short, often improvised series of notes put together in a quick run. Riffing shows off vocal flexibility and creativity, and is often considered the pop equivalent of scatting.

performance. However, Mukta said that she would be more comfortable setting a unique ad lib and using it for the course of the performance, so we developed one together. At first, she created an ad lib that was vocally impressive, but that seemed disconnected from Diana's character and the situation she was in. As I phrased it to Mukta, "There has to be a reason for this riff." After working on it together, Mukta came up with an ad lib that, while not as challenging vocally, seemed to match Diana's frustration and feeling of being trapped in that scene. Overall, it fit the show better.

In "I Miss The Mountains," on the other hand, Mukta created a small melodic alteration that I thought aided her interpretation of the song. Towards the end of the piece, Diana sings, "I miss the mountains/I miss the lonely climb/Wand'ring through the wilderness/And spending all my time/Where the air is clear/And cuts you like a knife." The written melody for, "And spending all my time," descends through the word "my."



Mukta, however, chose to sing a higher A note on "my," making it the highest note of the phrase. From a music composition perspective, this emphasized the fact that it was *her* time, not Dan's or anybody else's, and that she alone should get to choose how she spends it. Since Diana chooses at the end of the song to throw away her medication so that she can once again experience the highs and lows of her bipolar disorder, and regain the life that her medication took away, I found Mukta's alteration useful for the audience's understanding of Diana's character. We kept it in the show.

The idea of acting on a pitch was also incredibly helpful for Patrick, who had less acting experience than his fellow castmates going in, as he had performed in his first musical only a year ago. He therefore had difficulty at first carrying his character interpretation over into his singing. Encouraging him to treat each song as a way to further explore his character's relationships with the other characters in the play, instead of worrying about if his singing was "beautiful" enough, strengthened his performance significantly over the course of the rehearsal process.³⁴

I began working on the vocal style of the actors early on in the process. *Next to Normal* requires a more contemporary, pop-rock style of sound than traditionally found in musical theatre. This involves the vocalist placing their sound into their facial mask more, which creates the forward resonance that is a hallmark of contemporary singing. Contemporary singing is also often conversational; the actor's singing voice matches his or her speaking voice fairly closely. For some of my actors, this was not an issue, as they were accustomed to performing contemporary pieces. However, I had to work with Kyle especially to develop his contemporary sound, so that his voice would not sound out of place in the show. Kyle came into the rehearsal process with a rounded choral tone, with soft consonants and exaggeratedly pure vowels. While perfect for choral singing, as it allows for great blend, this style sounds out of place in a solo voice, especially for this contemporary style of show. To remedy this, I had Kyle speak his lyrics before singing them, so that he could hear where he placed and formed vowels and consonants in his speaking voice. I then had him sing the same lyrics using that same placement from speaking them previously. Some words proved more challenging than others. In his song, "Perfect For You," for instance, Kyle had difficulty singing the title phrase in a contemporary style, as he kept dropping the "r" of "perfect" and rounding the "ooh" vowel of "you." We spent many sessions

³⁴ Appendix 9 details the process I used to work with Patrick on this technique.

simply practicing this challenging phrase. I also had him sing his lines on a “nyah” syllable instead of on the words, as this syllable automatically makes the singer place his or her tone into a more nasally, contemporary-sounding place. These exercises helped Kyle immensely, and he rapidly developed a contemporary tone.³⁵

I also focused intently on vocal technique. The voice is a muscle, and like any other muscle in the body, it must be exercised properly to strengthen and maintain it. Otherwise, injury can occur. Vocal warm-ups were a crucial part of every rehearsal.³⁶ During this time I focused on three main areas: body, breath, and vocalises.

It is imperative for the body to be physically aligned when warming up for the actor to produce optimal sound. Therefore, I began by having my actors center themselves, balancing their weight so that they were leaning neither on their heels nor their toes, keeping their knees slightly bent, stacking their heads and necks straight on top of their spines, and letting go of any tension in their bodies. This neutral position allows for the most ease in producing sound.

Proper breathing is also crucial for a healthy, supported sound. After I made sure that the actors were all in a neutral physical position, I led them through a series of breathing exercises designed to teach them how to draw in a full breath, which is something we often take for granted. Singing requires a deeper breath than the shallow breathing we often use in our daily lives. I also had them practice controlling their flow of air from a breath when producing sound. To accomplish this, I had them draw in a breath on a specific number of counts, then breath out on a hiss for a specific number of counts. This allowed them to become accustomed to using the necessary amount of air to sustain a sound over a period of time.

³⁵ See Appendix 8 for more detail.

³⁶ My specific warm-ups for each day are detailed in my rehearsal journal (Appendix 9).

After this, I led a series of vocalises, or vocal warm-ups, focusing on three vocal registers: head, mix, and chest.³⁷ I instructed my actors to think of these registers less as separate entities and more as existing on a scale, where each register blends seamlessly into the next. Head voice, named for the vibrations singing in this register produces in the facial cavities, consists of the upper range of a singer's voice. Since this register produces a more classical tone, we did not use it frequently in singing *Next to Normal*. However, singing in head voice requires strong vocal technique, so using it in our warm-ups taught my cast how to properly use their voices, and benefited their singing in other registers as well. Chest voice rests in a lower, "speaking" register. Singers use chest voice to produce a style of singing popular in contemporary and pop music known as belting. Mix voice constitutes a blend of the head and chest registers. It is where a lot of musical theatre singing rests, as singing in mix often sounds light and conversational, a useful tool for story-based music.

Brendan and I spent significant time working on his technique during rehearsals. Many of the songs for his character, Gabe, contained long stretches of music in which he was required to sustain notes in the upper ranges of his chest voice. This required him to build vocal stamina and stronger belting technique, lest he strain his voice and cause injury to it. To help him, I first worked on Brendan's physical alignment when belting. He had the habit of pushing his neck forward when belting, which was making it harder for him to sing, as it forced the muscles in his throat to clench and inhibit the sound. To remedy this, I led him through exercises that forced him to release these muscles and engage his abdominals instead, which would produce a healthier, supported tone. For example, I had him push against my hands with his full strength as he sang: the physical exertion forced him to utilize the muscles in his abdomen, which in turn

³⁷ Vocal register refers to a set of pitches that all have the same quality of sound in a singer's voice. While head (and falsetto for men), mix, and chest are considered the main registers of the voice, vocal fry and whistle tone can also be thought of as registers (O'Connor 1).

produced a fuller, stronger belt. We then worked on achieving this support without him having to push against my hand. We also worked on placing his tone, creating more backspace for the sound to resonate, so that his tone remained one of singing and not of screaming. Towards the end of the rehearsal period, Brendan's vocal stamina and support had improved considerably. However, there were still a few melodic lines that he struggled to sing consistently because of the challenging nature of their range. As we approached the performance date, I made the executive decision to alter them, so that he would sing a few lower notes comfortably, instead of straining for a few higher notes that were still out of his range. In this circumstance, I found it wiser for Brendan to focus on acting the songs strongly, without worrying about whether he would hit a few notes correctly during the performance. Overall, these small changes did not detract from his character or my interpretation of the show, as he was still able to justify the music through his acting.

I also worked closely with Midge on her belting technique, as her character, Natalie, has several songs that require a higher belt than many singers are accustomed to. For example, in "Make Up Your Mind," Midge had to belt a high F, which is higher than her normal belting range. If she did not use proper technique to sustain this note, she not only risked having the note sound unsupported, but damaging her voice as well. Therefore, I spent a considerable amount of time with her working on her belt, using the pushing technique I had used with Brendan to ensure that she was engaging the correct muscles in her body. It was incredibly rewarding to hear her belt growing stronger over the rehearsal process; by the show it was fully supported and healthy.

Additionally, I encouraged my actors to find different vocal textures and approaches to the music, to give their performances more depth. For example, when Mukta and I first began

working on “I Miss The Mountains,” she was belting the entire ending at top volume, which, while vocally impressive, did little for Diana’s character, and would tire her voice out by the end of the show. Instead, we worked on pulling the volume back and incorporating more of her mix voice into the piece, which actually forced her to make stronger acting choices, as she could no longer rely on pure vocal exertion to create the emotion for her. Mukta found this key to maintaining her character interpretation through the music, writing in her post-production survey, “Sometimes, when you conserve yourself vocally, you are forced to make stronger acting choices physically, or you have to justify a choice to not belt a note full-out.”³⁸ Similarly, I worked with Midge in “Superboy And The Invisible Girl” to vary the vocal registers she used while singing, finding places to add texture, instead of belting the entire time.

In terms of coaching the ensemble numbers, I focused first on teaching notes, rhythms, and harmonies. I accomplished this by working with one actor or vocal part at a time, depending on what the song called for. I would play the individual harmony for an actor on the piano, then have him or her sing along. Once I had fixed any rhythmic or melodic errors, I would move on to teaching the next part. When I felt the actors were prepared, I would layer the different harmonies on top of each other. Some group numbers were more straightforward than others: Nick, Mukta, and Midge quickly picked up their harmonies in “Song of Forgetting,” and needed very little refreshing on those harmonies throughout the process. Songs like “It’s Gonna Be Good” and “Wish I Were Here,” however, required running several times a week from the top of our rehearsal period through the shows, where we would run them before every performance to make sure they stayed tight. This was because the harmonies for these pieces were more intricate and dissonant than, say, “Song of Forgetting.” Since the notes were less intuitive to the actors,

³⁸ See Appendix 12.

they had a more challenging time singing them against several other equally challenging harmonic lines.

Only once the melodic groundwork was solid did I move on to shaping the song. This involved several components. I looked at the style of each piece, which I had explored in my music analysis, and determined what the style required of the actors. For example, there is a portion of “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I” in which the style moves from the straight eighth notes of a waltz into the swung eighth notes of a jazz waltz. As this occurs, the characters of Natalie, Gabe, Dan, and Henry sing the transcribed equivalent of a jazz scat.³⁹

Jazz Waltz (swing ♩'s) **DR. FINE:** Goodman, Diana. Bipolar depressive with delusional episodes...

98 **NATALIE:** *mf* 99 100 *p* 101 102 103

— Doo doo

GABE, DAN
HENRY: *mf* *p*

Doo doo

Gtr. 8vb

mf Gm⁹ Jazz comping a la Dave Brubeck Gm⁹/D Gm⁹ Gm⁹/D Gm F⁶

w/Bs. Drs: time

When coaching this section, I focused on where my actors’ usual style of singing needed to differ here. For Midge, we worked on giving her tone a bit more “bounce”: she had been smoothing out her phrases, making them too legato for this particular section. I worked on the swung style of this section with Kyle, who had trouble at first differentiating the rhythm from

³⁹ Since scatting is improvised, the actors are not truly scatting in this section, but Kitt has captured its essence in this section.

that of straight eighth notes. And I worked with all four actors here on emphasizing the downbeat of each measure, to add the correct pulse to this passage.

I also looked at dynamics for each piece: the volume of sound each passage of music required, where a crescendo or decrescendo might heighten the audience's experience of a piece, and where I needed more volume from one actor and less from another to achieve a balance of sound. Dynamics are especially critical when working ensemble numbers, as they must be exaggerated in order to be distinguished. An actor singing a solo piece can afford to use more subtle dynamic changes; in a group however, they must work to sing noticeably more softly or loudly in order to make these changes heard. We therefore spent a good amount of time practicing creating effective dynamic changes within group numbers.

Similarly, the diction of the ensemble pieces needed to be exaggerated as well in order to be effective. Consonants and vowels had to be over-pronounced in order for the words to be intelligible to an audience. This was especially important for pieces in which the lyrics move very rapidly, such as "It's Gonna Be Good," and "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I," in which the actors must sing together very quickly. Poor diction would make their singing sounding sloppy; to avoid this, we often warmed up with diction exercises as well to get them accustomed to exaggerating their words in group numbers.

We also worked on their vocal blend as an ensemble, to make their sound more cohesive. There were many places in which I asked Nick and Mukta, both of whom have naturally loud voices, to pull back on volume in order to blend better with the other actors. I also had to be aware of when Brendan used falsetto on his higher harmonies, such as at the end of "Superboy And The Invisible Girl." Since Midge was full belting her harmony against Brendan's, the blend was off-balance at first. To remedy this, I asked Midge to incorporate a bit more of her mix into

her sound, which balanced better with Brendan's falsetto. I also made sure that the actors were in agreement on when they would sing with vibrato, and when they would sing with straight tone. For example, at the end of "Finale: Light," the actors were initially using different tones to sing the final held note of the song. To fix this, I suggested they sing the first four beats of the note on a straight tone, and then break together into vibrato. This cohesive movement created a powerful ending moment when done in unison.

When working with the actors, I focused as much on how the music needed to influence their vocal and acting-based interpretation as I did on making sure that they were singing their correct harmonies and using strong vocal technique. I used a variety of tactics to achieve this, often starting with assigning the actors the task of finding their characters' objectives in each song. This activates the piece, turning it from a melody into a tool for the actor to achieve this objective. It was important, however, for the actors to choose what I call "playable objectives." A playable objective is one that can be achieved over the course of a song. For example, when I worked "Superboy And The Invisible Girl" with Midge, the objective she initially chose for her character, Natalie, was to gain more attention from her family, and erase her brother's memory. However, we found that this objective was too overarching, too broad, for it to be playable; it was simply not possible for her to succeed in this endeavor over the course of a few minutes of music. Instead, we specified the objective into Natalie wanting an apology from her mother in that moment. This gave her something specific to work towards, and allowed her to employ various tactics within the song to achieve her goal.⁴⁰

I also had the actors speak their songs as monologues. Sometimes, the actors got so caught up in their singing that they forgot acting a song requires the same care as acting a monologue; temporarily removing music from the equation allowed them to hone in on their

⁴⁰ See Appendix 8 for further detail on working with playable objectives.

acting choices within the lyrics of the piece. It also highlighting where different choices needed to be made. For example, when Nick and I worked on Dan's "I Am The One," we discussed his character's repetition of the phrase, "I am..." at the top of every line of the refrain.⁴¹ When a composer repeats a phrase several times within a song, it is important for the actor to examine why this repetition occurs. It can indicate a key to understanding a character; the composer may also intend for there to be a different nuance to each iteration of the line. Nick and I spoke through "I Am The One" as a monologue to find different ways to emphasize his repeated lines.

Conversely, I also emphasized the importance of the orchestration in interpreting a song. Often, performers think that in order to act the song, they must ignore the orchestration. In reality, if they allow it to help them, the orchestration can provide subtext and another layer to their acting choices. As Midge noted in her post-production survey, "This show taught me how to act...because I finally learned how to marry singing and acting into one art form...By helping us find musical hints and messages that are interspersed throughout the score, Goldie [Alex] taught us so much more about our characters than we ever would have known ourselves...we had an extra key to character exploration, and by combining what we knew musically with what we were exploring with Dustyn in the libretto, we could embody these characters in every aspect..."⁴² By examining where and why changes in the music occur, which words receive emphasis in the music, and where dynamic contrasts occur, my actors were able to create nuanced interpretations for each song.

While I employed many tactics and strategies, detailed in my rehearsal journal, to help my actors heighten their performances, there were a few that I found absolutely essential to my

⁴¹ In "I Am The One," Dan tries to convince Diana of his love for her by listing all of the different ways in which he has protected her, and stayed by her side through her illness. He sings, "I am the one who knows you/I am the one who cares/I am the one who's always been there."

⁴² See Appendix 12.

process. For example, I drove home the idea of the eighty-twenty rule. This is the concept that in a performance, an actor can put eighty percent of himself into the mindset of his character: that character's objectives, emotions, and relationships to other characters become his own, to an extent. However, twenty percent of his mind must remain in control of himself as an actor. This is especially important for a show such as *Next to Normal*, where disappearing completely into a character could cause serious emotional distress and, from a musical point of view, vocal damage as well. The twenty percent of the mind that remains cognizant of the performance allows the actor to rely on technique to keep himself healthy and safe throughout a performance. This was a note I gave often to Mukta, who had the tendency to throw herself completely into her character, and who would often risk losing control of herself in the process. While working with her, we created a mantra that she found helpful: "You are in control, even when Diana is not." This gave her permission to hold onto her craft as an actor; she stopped over-exerting herself physically and vocally during the show, which allowed her to sustain the performance over several hours each night and for multiple consecutive shows. It also did not detract in any way from her believability as Diana – in fact, keeping a tighter reign on herself allowed her to focus her performance and make stronger acting and vocal choices. As Mukta explained in her post-production survey, "Two acts as Diana is vocally taxing, and reminding my actor-self of that during shows was very important and something I learned to work with."⁴³

Similarly, I worked with my actors on getting out of their own way, so to speak, during performances. For example, Mukta had a habit of flailing her arms and using extreme physical movement to create emotional intensity during her song "The Break." As an exercise, I forced her to sing it while sitting in a chair, occupying her hands by focusing on folding a piece of paper into a paper airplane, and to only look up from her task when she found it absolutely necessary.

⁴³ See Appendix 12.

By concentrating her energy in this way, I was able to help Mukta channel it into a more honest and raw emotional performance, instead of allowing her emotion to dissipate through distracting physical gesture. I used the same paper-folding trick with Nick when working “I’ve Been.”

Another concept my actors found extremely useful was that of “growing notes.” This is the idea that when a note is held during a song, there should always be a dynamic change during that held note, whether that change is growing softer or louder. Since music is experienced temporally, a static note in which no change occurs can lower the energy of a moment for an audience, and pull them out of the performance. Growing notes activate the moment for actor and audience and keep the song moving forward from both a musical and acting standpoint.

Finally, I worked with my actors on dealing with an audience during a live performance. A live audience adds an unregulated element to a performance; we cannot predict with any certainty where they will laugh, applaud, or remain absolutely silent. Therefore, with a sung-through show such as *Next to Normal*, I found it crucial to practice with my actors how to handle unexpected audience reactions while singing. In an integrated show such as this one, songs and scenes blend seamlessly together into action. This is often a trademark of more contemporary shows, as opposed to traditional pieces, where characters stop a scene to burst into song. In fact, in *Next to Normal*, it is often difficult for the audience to tell when one song has ended and the next has begun, as the transitions are so fluid. Even in my piano-conductor score, the beginning of a song might actually start on the final page of the previous song, like in “I Am The One,” where Dan’s first line actually begins in the final measure of Diana’s “You Don’t Know”:

35 ev-er on the run... 36 If it gets me, it will kill me 37 but I don't know what I've done. Can you

DAN: w/Perc. mp sfz Right into

Gtr. sim. C F w/Gtr. E7sus mp Attacca #10

The lack of a button, a musical beat and pause at the end of a song, makes it difficult for an audience to know when to applaud. As Rosenhaus and Cohen write in *Writing Musical Theater*, “A button makes clear to the audience that the song is over, and that it is time to applaud.

Without a button the audience can become confused, unsure whether or not to applaud. The button is a long-established convention of musical theater, and audiences wishing to applaud become frustrated when a button does not appear at the end of a song" (137). Most of the songs in *Next to Normal* lack this. I had experience with an audience's reaction to this type of musical from my performance in *Spring Awakening* last year, where songs similarly bled into each other, leaving the audience confused as to when to clap. Often, they would begin to clap as the next song was beginning, which at first threw us off as performers until we learned to anticipate applause from the audience at unexpected points. I imparted this knowledge into my actors, so that they would be prepared to sing over audience applause if necessary, or hold off before beginning to sing the next piece if possible to allow the audience time to applaud.

Tech Week

Tech week is the theatrical term for the days leading up to a show opening in which all technical elements of the show are incorporated into the production. Starting the Friday before opening night, we added microphones, sound, lighting, costumes, props, hair, and makeup throughout the course of the week.

One of the biggest challenges I faced this week was working with our sound designer Professor Heath Hansum and our Audio Technicians Drew Hopkins and Allen Taylor to properly mix each actor's voice using microphones, and balancing their voices with the prerecorded tracks. I sat with Drew, who would be running the microphones for the shows, during each tech rehearsal, to inform him when actors would be singing offstage, when someone's microphone volume needed to be raised or lowered to create the blend I desired, and when I wanted particular sections of songs to stand out. For example, in "Wish I Were Here," Nick, Brendan, and Kyle sing offstage for a majority of the song. Since Drew was automatically turning their microphones off when they exited the stage, I needed to make a note for him to keep their microphones on for their harmonies. In "Just Another Day," I had Drew raise Brendan's microphone level for the last section in which all of the characters sing together; since Brendan sings in falsetto here, his voice is naturally softer than the others actors, and his microphone needed to amplify him so that his harmony would be heard. This was challenging because there are so many places throughout the show where minor adjustments needed to be made to produce a proper blend of sound; often Drew would be mixing voices while also tracking microphone entrances and exits, and it took several days for us to achieve the desired mix.

The acoustics of the black box also made working with sound challenging. Even when the musical tracks were loud enough for the audience, the actors onstage struggled to hear them,

but if we pushed the music too loud, the audience would be unable to make out the characters' lines. Additionally, the music for large group numbers, such as "Just Another Day," "My Psychopharmacologist And I," and "Wish I Were Here," needed to be significantly louder than the music for solo numbers and softer ballads, such as "There's A World" and "A Light In The Dark." Drew, Heath, and I worked throughout the week to find a balance that would work for both actor and audience.

Allen and I also worked together to figure out a way to cue the actors for vamp lines during their songs. In the music of *Next to Normal*, there are several measures that "vamp," or repeat indefinitely until an actor's dialogue has ended and they are ready to move to the next set of lyrics. Had we a live orchestra, the musicians would simply vamp under the actor and take their cue from that actor to move on. However, with the prerecorded tracks the number of vamps was set, and the actors would have to time how long they had to say certain lines. In rehearsal, I cued them vocally to continue, but this of course would not be an option during the show. We considered having them memorize their vamp timing, but in the scene, and with some vamps that lasted for eighteen or more measures, that would have been extraordinarily difficult to perfect. Instead, Allen and I eventually settled on programming a visual cue into one of the show lights, so that a blue light that only the actors could see would flash when the actors had to continue onto their next line. We rehearsed with this vamp light throughout the week so that the actors could grow more confident with it.

We experienced some technical difficulties with the microphones over the course of the week. Our department generally does not produce musicals in the Tustin black box, as it is a more intimate space and more difficult to properly mic – the sound systems produced a lot of feedback into the microphones at first. We also had to work on finding a microphone level and

quality that would amplify the actors' voices in a natural way, so that the sound still seemed to come from them and not from the sound systems above the audience's heads. Occasionally too much reverb entered the microphones, making the actors sound like they were singing at a pop concert, so we had to keep adjusting those levels during the tech process as well.

Performances

During tech week, Dustyn and I developed a performance routine with our actors that we continued on into the shows. At 5:00, the actors arrived at the theatre to begin getting into hair and makeup in their dressing rooms. At 5:45, they met Dustyn and me upstairs in the black box for warm-ups. Dustyn performed a series of exercises and tongue twisters with them to warm them up physically and sharpen their diction. After she finished, I ran a series of vocal warm-ups to open up their voices, expand their range, and prepare them for the challenging vocals of *Next to Normal*. Following warm up, Drew and Allen attached microphones to each actor, then ran mic check with them. For mic check, each actor walks around the stage while speaking and singing various lines from the show, so that the audio technicians can ensure that the microphones are working properly and that the levels are correct. After this, the actors head downstairs to finish getting into costume. At 7:00, Dustyn and I run a final actor group warm-up with the cast to focus them and prepare them for the performance; at this time, the house opens upstairs and the audience is free to enter the theatre. Shortly after, the actors check their props and costume pieces and get set for the top of the show.

We had our first audience on Thursday for a preview performance, also known as a “soft open.” This was a donation-only performance, with all proceeds going towards Transitions of PA. Preview performances are extremely helpful because they allow the cast to practice performing with an audience, which can drastically alter a performance. It is hard to predict where an audience will laugh or applaud during a show, or even what their reaction to certain scenes overall will be, so having fresh eyes watching the show that Thursday benefited both the cast and the creative team of the show. Having bodies in the seats also altered our sound

atmosphere, as the bodies actually absorbed some of the sound. Keeping this in mind, Drew and I agreed that the sound levels would need to be raised for the following performances.

Friday and Saturday night, I was finally able to sit back and experience the show I had been working towards producing since my first year at Bucknell. Watching the audience react through laughter and tears at my actors' work, and watching how far my cast had come since their first rehearsal, was beyond rewarding. Even with a few small technical difficulties with the microphones, the show was very well received both evenings.

Sunday morning, however, I was woken early with the news that Nick Talbot, our lead male, had become extremely ill overnight and would be unable to perform that day. After overcoming our initial shock and concern, Dustyn, our stage manager Lauren Scott, and I were faced with the task of figuring out how to proceed. We would have to move quickly, as we had approximately five hours before curtain for our matinee that afternoon. Since the show was sold out, canceling did not feel like a viable option, especially as the cast only gets to perform the show four times in a run. However, we did not have any understudies for the actors. In that moment, Dustyn told me that the most logical solution was to have me step in to play the role of Dan Goodman in that day's performance. This, of course, was not something I had anticipated having to do within my duties as a music director. However, as music director, I was intimately familiar with all of the music, and with Nick's role, having coached him in it for months. I also knew the show better than anyone we could have tried to bring in to read Nick's lines. And as a performer, I trusted myself to be able to stand in front of a couple hundred people and read lines and carry out stage movement for the first time without getting flustered or stopping the show.

So, by nine o'clock that morning, our entire cast and creative team was gathered in Tustin to discuss the plan. It was incredibly difficult to break the news to the cast that one of the people

they had worked with for months and forged a close bond with would be unable to perform that day. I was worried that I would seem like an intruder, stepping in as Dan, but fortunately the cast placed their complete trust in me to support them and help carry the show.

The next step was learning all of Nick's blocking in a matter of a couple hours. Dustyn walked me through all of his scenes and transitions, and then I ran each scene once with the cast in the short amount of time we had. While the rest of the actors left briefly to go home and prepare for the afternoon show, I stayed to refresh myself on Nick's specific harmonies for each song, and also to figure out where I might have to make adjustments to his vocal lines. Since the role is of course written for a man, some of the melodies were too low for my voice; I determined where I could sing them up the octave, where I could sing alternate notes, and where I could sing them in the original key.

Paula Davis, the head of our costume department, also came in that morning to fit me for a male costume, since Nick's costume would be far too large on me, while our hair and makeup assistant Delaney Clark determined how best to style my hair for the show, settling on a rolled French braid. Before the show, I was fitted for a microphone and underwent an extensive mic check, so that Drew could figure out how to mix my voice, which is significantly different from Nick's, to fit into the blend of the show. Before the performance, Dustyn made a pre-show announcement that I would be going on for the character of Dan, and that I would be on-book (holding the script in a binder as I performed), and then the show began. I ended up performing as Dan for the Monday night show as well.

The entire situation felt extraordinarily surreal in the moment. Truly, when we think of worst-case scenarios for shows in an academic setting, a lead with no understudy falling ill halfway through a run is very high up on the list. However, due to the nature of the situation, we

all jumped so quickly into action, working as a unified team, that I did not even have time to be terrified of whether the project I had planned for nearly three years would crash and burn if I had to play the role of Dan on-book for our final two performances.

While Dan is not a role that I could ever be cast to play in real life, I worked with the given circumstances to create a believable performance for that show. As I would never be able to recreate Nick's performance in such a short amount of time, I focused instead on supporting my fellow cast members onstage, and making sure that our show still communicated what I had set out to accomplish all along. Fortunately, based on audience feedback we were still able to achieve this.

I could never have taken on Nick's role had it not been for the extensive research and preparation I did to familiarize myself with the show as music director. While I hope never to have to step in for an actor under these circumstances again, it was in a way comforting to know that even when faced with a genuine disaster, I could fall back on my acting and music training to create a solution.

Reflections

Looking back on this process, I am filled foremost with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for everyone who has contributed to the success of this project. When I first conceived of this as idea for my senior independent study as a first-year, I could never have anticipated its scope, and the sheer number of people it would encompass. The road to closing night of *Next to Normal* was long, often challenging, and at times exhausting, but I never for a moment regretted my decision to undertake the project that has vastly shaped my trajectory as a student at Bucknell and a professional in the theatre industry.

One of my goals for this production was to shine a light on mental illness in our society; I wanted to show that mental illness is more prevalent than many people think, and that it affects us in various ways, whether we suffer from one, take care of someone with one, or simply see it portrayed in different ways in the media. The most rewarding part of this process for me came after each performance, when various audience members would approach me and describe how they had each related to a different character in the show. In *Next to Normal*, they had all found someone they could see themselves in. It is a comforting thing to know that we are not alone. If I provided even one person with a small sense of this feeling, then I believe I succeeded in my goal for this project.

I also grew immensely as a music director from this process. I was able to explore different methods of coaching vocal technique and interpretation, and learned how to work with actors coming from various musical backgrounds. I have discovered what sets my style of music direction apart from the many approaches I have experienced: when I music direct, my aim is not solely to shape the music of the show to fit my interpretation, but to educate and share the reasons behind my interpretation with my actors. My goal is to give them the tools to begin to

interpret the score for themselves as well, so that they do not have to rely on me to make their choices for them. I want the people I music direct to grow as artists through their work with me: the process is just as valuable as the result.

More broadly, my work with *Next to Normal* has given me a stronger understanding of the role of music in musical theatre. The use of music to inform direction is not something unique to *Next to Normal*, or even to contemporary musical theatre. For decades, composers have masterfully written integrated scores filled with clues to character and action. Going forward, I know now to examine every score with the same depth that I devoted to the score of *Next to Normal*. Understanding the history of the musical as an art form was key to my interpretation of the score of *Next to Normal*, as the enumerable composers and lyricists who came before Kitt and Yorkey all had a hand in influencing their work.

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26

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Supplementary Materials: Production Photos Taken By Gordon Wenzel







Appendix 1
Initial 319 Production Proposal & Supplement
Submitted to the Department of Theatre and Dance Play Selection Committee

Next to Normal by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey
 Alex Golden '17 THEA 319 Proposal
 Spring 2017
Advisor Consulted: Dustyn Martincich

Artistic Intent

Content

Mental illness is a subject often romanticized in the arts and literature. As a *New York Times* article on *Next to Normal* points out, “In Western culture psychic pain has tended to be seen as the territory of the artist, visionary, rebel and genius, from Emily Dickinson to Sylvia Plath and Friedrich Nietzsche to John Forbes Nash Jr. So it should be no surprise that madness is often used to signify creativity, sensitivity or spiritual and intellectual depth” (Cohen). Furthermore, as psychiatrist Phillip S. Freeman writes in *Against Depression*, mental illness is generally “used in a story to illustrate some idea about madness, not madness itself” (Cohen). When a character in a show suffers from depression, more often than not the mental illness is glossed over; depression acts as a trope to cast someone as an emotionally tortured, likely misunderstood artist. We have been trained to believe that mental illness is a sign of true artistry and genius: think of Vincent Van Gogh and Virginia Woolf. We do not see the ugly reality of living with such a disease. Nor do we often see theatrical depictions of “ordinary” people struggling with mental illness, and here is what makes *Next to Normal* so special: Aware of the romanticization of depression in the arts, Kitt and Yorkey were determined to dispel that notion. ““Someone said to make her a painter,’ Yorkey said of the protagonist, Diana. ‘I said no. She’s a suburban mother’” (Cohen). Kitt and Yorkey were determined to remain as faithful to the realities of living with a mental illness as possible, and to avoid merely using it for dramatic effect.

And so we are introduced to the Goodmans, a family, on the surface, no different from any other. But we soon learn that the mother, Diana, suffers from bipolar depression, which causes her to endure delusions, experience manic episodes, and even attempt suicide. The musical comprehensively explores her battle with the illness, and here again we see something unique: unlike some plays about grappling with mental illness, such as David Auburn’s *Proof*, *Next to Normal* does not focus just on Diana’s pain -- it also shows the collateral damage her illness has caused. Diana’s husband Dan is not depicted as a “bad guy” for wanting her to take medicine and undergo experimental treatments; instead, we empathize with him as he cleans bloodstains out of the carpet after Diana’s suicide attempt and asks, “Who’s crazy – the one who’s uncured?/Or maybe the one who’s endured?/The one who has treatments, or the/One who just lives with the pain?” (Kitt and Yorkey 45) Diana’s daughter, Natalie, is not left untouched. A chronic

overachiever, she desperately tries to win love from a mother who is incapable of fully giving it, and eventually turns to drugs as a method of coping, singing, “So it’s times like these I wonder how I take it./And if other families live the way we do./If they love each other or if they just fake it./And if other daughters feel like I feel, too./’Cause some days I think I’m dying/But I’m really only trying to get through” (Kitt and Yorkey 27).

This is incredibly important, as it validates the feelings of people who live out this struggle daily. According to Brian Yorkey, “Ever time I’m at the show I meet someone who’s bipolar or who grew up with a bipolar parent...there’s been someone there who says, ‘This is my story.’” (Reesman 15). Living with mental illness, or living in a home with mental illness, is isolating; it is hard to imagine that anyone could even begin to understand the intricacies and complications of this struggle. And so many feel compelled to hide this part of themselves from others, for fear of rejection at not being “normal.”

The thing is, normality itself is a social construct, and something that we have been trained to put far too much stock in. This is a problem especially relevant to Bucknell’s campus, where students are typically high-achievers, and often under pressure not only to succeed at an exceptionally high level academically, but to conform to a very specific set of conventions socially as well. I have spoken to so many people on this campus who struggle just to get through the day, be it due to depression, anxiety, or crushing stress, but who are terrified to seek counseling or even ask their friends for help because they believe that “normal” people do not deal with this sort of thing. They think that there is something wrong with them, and are determined to hide it from the rest of the world by donning a mask and pretending that everything is fine. *Next to Normal* speaks to this campus, shattering the stigma around mental illness that is still prevalent here. While writing this show, Tom Kitt says, “I learned to see [depression] in its true form, which is that it’s a disease. I think there’s a tendency...to say, ‘Why can’t that person snap out of it? Why are they acting that way?’ Brian has that great line when the doctor says it’s a disease like hypertension or diabetes and it must be treated” (Reesman 15). That is a message that I know students at Bucknell need to hear.

As Anthony Rapp writes in the foreword to the published copy of *Next to Normal*’s script, “When writing musicals...it’s easy to be clever, it’s easy to be corny, it’s easy to take the easy way out. It takes guts to get to the heart of the matter, to not flinch away from the painful truths and heartbreaks that we all live through. It takes guts to write about love and life and death and grief and joy” (Kitt and Yorkey 16). *Next to Normal* is a beautifully written, powerful look into a family dealing with mental illness, and a show that is vital for the Bucknell community at this time.

Direction

I am incredibly passionate about musical theatre, both as a performer and as a director, and plan on pursuing a career in this field upon graduating. Having the chance to direct *Next to Normal* as a 319 project would allow me the chance to improve as a music director, a rare opportunity here. I have worked as a music director at a community theatre, and have been music directing my a cappella group here since my sophomore year, and it is a career path that I am very interested in.

What excites me about *Next to Normal* is how the music follows the content of the show: as Tom Kitt puts it, “For me, the story always drove the music...For the pharmacologist number, for example, I remember the day we hit on the jazz waltz. I wanted to desensitize the drugs, almost make it feel like it’s in radio jingle land because I think there is a sense, especially on television...that they do try to desensitize a little bit what they’re selling. So musically it seemed to me that that wistful, spring-in-your-step type music worked well for that, as opposed to saying, ‘This needs to be jazzier.’” (Reesman 14). The music is such an integral part of the show that a crossover between directing and music directing feels natural.

Some Thoughts on Design, Production, and Budget

A musical is, above all, a collaborative process. I would be extremely excited to work with members of both the Department of Theatre and Dance and the Music Department in this endeavor, students as well as faculty. For example, Dustyn and I recently discussed the possibility of collaborating on this project, which is something that I would be thrilled about.

Next to Normal is an intimate show in terms of size, with a cast of six (4M, 2F). This is perfect, as it will allow me to spend time working in-depth with every actor and to focus on character development through song in a manageable setting.

While *Next to Normal* is not a dance-heavy show, there are a few numbers that I would like to coordinate movement into, such as *My Psychopharmacologist and I*, which sets lyrics “Without a little lift/The ballerina falls” to a jazzy waltz. Therefore, I am interested in working with a movement specialist to develop choreography for these movements. I have approached Genna Hartnett, a student choreographer in the dance program who is also passionate about theatre, with this idea. I know Genna well, and trust her with this not only because I have seen the high level of work she holds herself to, but because of her commitment to storytelling in her choreography. She views dancing as an emotional tool to share a story, which is exactly what I would ask for from a choreographer. In the time since I first approached her, she has listened to the soundtrack and has already started sending me her thoughts.

I understand that I am asking a lot of my design team, especially my sound designer, in requesting their assistance on this project. I am willing to make any adjustments needed to avoid unnecessary technical complications, and to assist them in any way possible.

I know that musicals tend to be more expensive than straight plays, in terms of obtaining the rights and handling the added element of music. However, I would compensate for that in other areas of the budget. My focus in undertaking this project is on acting through song, and so I am asking for very little in terms of set and costuming. A simple, pared-down set would highlight my actors and would not detract from the production in any way. And since this is a contemporary play, much of the costuming would come straight out of the actors' closets. In terms of a pit, standard orchestration calls for guitar, bass, violin, cello, piano, and drums. I am more than willing to consider other options, however, including a pared-down pit or even canned music as an alternative.

Next to Normal is licensed by Music Theatre International (MTI), the link to which can be found here: <http://mtishows.com/next-to-normal>

Timeline

Ideally, I would hold auditions during the fall semester, in order to begin music rehearsals, which I would run and accompany, before winter break. By doing this, I want to ensure that the cast is comfortable with the music when starting to block and stage the show come spring semester during the official rehearsal period.

During staging rehearsals, I would like to make use of MTI's resource, RehearScore (<http://mtishows.com/marketplace/resource/pre-performance/rehearscorerplus>). The program is "A complete digital rendition of the Piano-Conductor Score sequenced by a top Broadway pianist precisely the way the composer intended. Every musical number (including scene changes, dance music and underscoring) is recorded in its entirety..." I have used this program before in high school, when my director acted as music director as well. It is invaluable. Every cast member receives a copy of the program, which has all vocal lines recorded and which allows them to isolate their specific lines in songs, so that they can rehearse on their own and over winter break. It allows us to add cuts and vamps, and change tempo within songs.

Coursework

RESC 098 (Discovery of the Expressive Self)
 THEA 102 (Theatrical Rehearsal and Performance)
 THEA 145 (Bucknell Backstage)
 THEA 207 (Musical Theatre)
 THEA 220 (Acting II)
 THEA 240 (Directing the Play)
 THEA 256 (Rituals, Festivals, and Institutions)
 THEA 258 (Modernism in Performance)
 THEA 260 (Theatre and Revolution)

THEA 265 (Shakespeare in Performance)

THEA 261 (Inner Journey: Sam Shepard and American Theatre)

DANC 105 (Jazz Dance Technique I)

Production History

Directing

Fall 2015 - *'Dentity Crisis* and *The Actor's Nightmare* by Christopher Durang

Fall 2014 - *Daniel on a Thursday* by Garth Wingfield (Cocktails)

Performing

Spring Awakening (Wendla)

Tartuffe (Flipote)

The Mystery of Edwin Drood (Beatrice/Miss Florence Gill)

Scripted (Elaine - Cocktails 2013)

All the Great Books (Abridged)

Playwriting/Composing

The Knowledge Project

Assistant Stage Managing

Fall Dance Concert 2015

Fall Dance Showcase 2013

Sources Consulted

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319 Production Proposal Supplement – March 2016

After further discussion with Dustyn and Gary since the submission of my 319 proposal, I thought it best to include this supplemental information for the department's consideration. Thank you very much in advance for reading!

Additional Thoughts on Design, Production, and Budget

I have come to realize, given the limited rehearsal period for this production, that it is in the best interest of the show to split the duties of stage director and music director. Dustyn has very generously agreed to take on the responsibilities of stage director, so that I can focus primarily on the music director of this piece. I am thrilled about this collaboration, and look forward to working with and learning from Dustyn throughout this process.

Furthermore, my advisors and I have looked closely into the budget for this production, and I have some preliminary budget projections:

- ☐ I have used Music Theatre International's (MTI) budget calculator to roughly determine the cost of licensing *Next to Normal* from them. Assuming that this show takes place in Tustin with four performances for a 120-seat house, the projected cost of royalties, rentals, and the security deposit comes to around \$896-\$1213.
- ☐ I have also looked into my options for providing music for the show.
 - ☐ One option is using a pit, to provide live music for the show. Based on consultation with *Spring Awakening*'s music director, Paul Helm, my ideal pit size would be six musicians, which would cost \$3000 total. However, Paul noted that the pit could be pared down to just three musicians if necessary (covering piano, cello, and percussion), for a total cost of \$1500.
 - ☐ Another option available to me is using canned music. I have experience with this, having music directed and performed at a community theatre that used pre-recorded tracks in place of a live orchestra. That theatre used a company called "Custom Broadway MIDI," which prepared professional-quality tracks for not only the songs, but also the underscoring and scene changes, and worked with us to make any adjustments to key or tempo that we requested. I reached out to Custom Broadway MIDI this past week, and they have informed me that the total cost of this service, which includes the use of their tracks for all rehearsals and performances, is \$1200.

Finally, I have given more thought to the sound design of this show. Previously, I had been concerned about how to incorporate the use of microphones in the Tustin black box. However, I realized that while working at the community theatre I mentioned above, which is comparable in

size to Tustin, we never once used microphones in our performances. Due to the small size of the theatre, all of the performers' voices carried perfectly to the audience without need for further amplification. Using canned music for the performances would actually be a benefit here, as we would be able to ensure that our music did not overpower our performers.

Appendix 2

Next to Normal Audition and Callback Journal

Audition and Callback Journal

Monday, October 3, 6-8 pm – Tustin Acting Studio

Audition structure

- Auditionees were instructed beforehand to prepare a 32 bar cut of a song from a pop-rock musical
 - I also gave them a list of potential musicals to choose songs from, in order to give them an idea of the type of music I was looking to hear
 - The songs on this list were written in a style similar to the music from *Next to Normal*, which would allow me to get an idea of how each actor would sound performing in our show
- Auditionees signed up in advance for five minute slots of time, in which they would perform their brief song selection while I accompanied them on the piano

Audition notes

- As music director, I focused both on the quality of voice of the actor and on their interpretation of the song
 - I looked to see if the actor was merely singing the piece, or if they were using it as a vehicle to express a character
- After the actor performed their piece once, I gave them adjustments and asked them to sing their piece again
 - A frequent adjustment I gave was instructing the actor to consider their character's objective in the song: what did their character want? How were they planning on achieving it through this song?
 - I also asked the actor to do something known as "raising the stakes," which heightens the drama and action of a scene by making it more urgent for the character to achieve an objective or overcome an obstacle in a scene.
 - I gave adjustments during the auditions for two reasons: first of all, I wanted to see how readily an actor would take direction. If they committed entirely to my adjustments, even if they did not necessarily give the interpretation I was looking for, I was far more likely to recommend them for a callback because they took direction and made strong choices with their character. Second, I wanted to give all of the actors the experience of working with acting through song, an area of theatre to which many students at Bucknell are not often exposed.
- A common theme I noticed among today's auditions is that many students are unsure of how to work with an accompanist during an audition.

- Although I had instructed them to bring their sheet music in a binder, several forgot to bring sheet music entirely, while other simply handed it to me loose, which makes it very difficult to turn pages.
- Other students did not know how to give their song tempo, or how to mark their cuts.
- This is something I will keep in mind if I music direct in an academic setting again.
 - Running a workshop on how to work with an accompanist could be extremely beneficial to students.

After auditions ended for the evening, Dustyn and I created a callback list of actors that we were considering casting.

- We first determined who we were interested in seeing for each role.
- We had previously determined what songs and scenes we wanted to see for each character, so our next task was figuring out which actors would read together for each scene.
 - Determining pairings was the most time-consuming part of this task.
- Finally, we wrote up the list.
 - Each actor was informed of what characters they had been called back for, and what songs and scenes they would have to prepare.
 - They were also told to pick up sheet music and the scenes from the green room of Harvey Powers, in order to rehearse before their callbacks.

Tuesday, October 4, 5-10pm – Coleman Hall Classroom

Callback structure

- Singing and acting callbacks were integrated, and structure similarly for each character
 - For example, every actress called back for the role of Natalie would enter the room together.
- I ran through each song they were to have rehearsed beforehand to see if they had any questions before we began. I also had them sing through the songs together as a group.
 - Next, they sang each song cut one by one. I made notes, but did not give adjustments this time through.
 - Afterwards, they read through their audition scene
 - Their scene involved the character of Henry, so the actors auditioning for the role of Henry read with the different actresses auditioning for Natalie as part of their own auditions as well.
 - We used this structure for the other character roles as well.

Callback notes

- As the music director, I understood that the actors had had to learn these audition songs in a very short period of time. In an actual rehearsal period, they would have almost two months in which to learn their music with me. Therefore, I was less concerned with how

accurately they nailed their rhythms and more concerned with how they interpreted the music as their characters, and the style in which they sang the music.

- For example, one actress who auditioned sang the music beautifully, but her character choices were not strong, which made it difficult to envision her as the role.
- On the other hand, a different actor accidentally sang the wrong lyric in his callback strong, but created a compelling character while singing, which drew me in and allowed me to see what he would bring to the role.

After callbacks, Dustyn, our movement specialist Genna Hartnett, our stage manager Lauren Scott, and myself made casting decisions.

- This was challenging, as so many of the people we called back delivered strong auditions.
- We looked not only at the actor as an individual, but also how they would work paired with other actors in their roles.
 - This is crucial to examine, because different actors have very different chemistry when paired together
 - Age was also a factor: the actress playing the daughter could not read as older than the actress playing the mother
- After much debate, we came to an agreement on our cast list:
 - Mukta Phatak will play the role of Diana, the mother.
 - Midge Zuk will play the role of Natalie, the daughter.
 - Nick Talbot will play the role of Dan, the husband.
 - Brendan Trybus will play the role of Gabe, the son.
 - Kyle Cohick will play the role of Henry, Natalie's boyfriend.
 - Patrick Newhart will play the roles of Dr. Fine and Dr. Madden, Diana's therapists.

Appendix 3
Cast List

NEXT TO NORMAL
CAST LIST

DAN.....*Nick Talbot*
GABE.....*Brendan Trybus*
HENRY.....*Kyle Cohick*
DOCTOR.....*Patrick Newhart*
DIANA.....*Mukta Phatak*
NATALIE.....*Midge Zuk*

Appendix 4

Example of Fall Semester Design Meeting Notes

Notes Taken by Stage Manager Lauren Scott

N2N Design Meeting 10/17/16

- Address read through – Sunday we're back for rehearsal
 - Design presentation week after
- Next meeting – 10/24 (next Monday)
 - Last before next semester
 - What day do we want to do meetings next semester?
- Update from me: Goldie will let me know when to reserve music building for rehearsals before break and I will talk to Chris
- Review floor plan
 - Floor = Section 1; Down SL platform = 2; Up SL = 3; Up SR = 4
 - Delete block downstage from center stairs
 - SL platform height?
 - Bed, front porch, bench?
 - Front porch – exterior so not part of this structure?
 - Center tall block?
 - SL shorter block by stairs?
 - 2 large open spaces SR
 - One = storage; one = sittable
 - Center shelves – prop space
 - Audience
 - Same aisles as usual?
 - 2 on end, 1 in middle?
- Scene to scene
 - Things we need in each scene
 - In a house pg. 1-8 – by location?
 - How do we want to break up the script into scenes?
 - Keyboard as practical? Yes?
 - Who's crazy
 - Doctor's office on base floor (1) isolated between front tall pillar and (2)
 - Where's Dan's home?

Appendix 5

Song Breakdown by Character

Song Breakdown By Character							
ACT I	Diana	Dan	Gabe	Natalie	Henry	Doctor Madden	
Just Another Day							6
Everything Else							1
Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I							6
Perfect For You							2
I Miss the Mountains							1
It's Gonna Be Good							6
He's Not Here							1
You Don't Know							1
I Am The One							2
Superboy And The Invisible Girl							3
Doctor Rock							1
I'm Alive							1
Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I'm Failing							6
I Dreamed A Dance							1
There's A World							1
I've Been							2
Didn't I See This Movie?							1
A Light In The Dark							2
ACT II							
Wish I Were Here							6
Song of Forgetting							3
Hey #1							2
Seconds And Years							3
Better Than Before							4
Aftershocks							1
Hey #2							2
You Don't Know (Reprise)							2
Music Box							1
How Could I Ever Forget?							2
It's Gonna Be Good (Reprise)							2
Why Stay?							2
A Promise							2
I'm Alive (Reprise)							1
The Break							1
Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me (Reprise)							3
Maybe (Next To Normal)							2
Hey #3/Perfect For You (Reprise)							2
So Anyway							1
I Am The One (Reprise)							2
Finale: Light							6

Appendix 6

Example of Production Meeting Minutes

Notes Taken by Stage Manager Lauren Scott

Next to Normal Production Meeting 1/27/17

- Designer run: now Monday the 6th
- Tech week schedule
 - Begin dry tech Friday 1-5pm
 - Preview wed, opening thurs?
 - Official opening Friday as usual
 - Difficult to have costumes/things ready earlier than planned
 - Thursday = preview, possible charge, discounted
 - Food bank night? Heath
 - Wednesday = possible arts college invite
- Box office for merit weekend
 - Make sure admissions doesn't give all arts merit (dance, writing, etc) tix
 - 9 theatre kids – only offer to them? Tickets? Vouchers? Find out if def coming
 - Contact people ahead of time
 - Anything we can do for women's community? Tix or donations?
 - New women's resource director
 - If women's resource person can come to show and collect all money that's fine
- Applause?
 - Think about during design run
 - Make transitions for lights?
 - People's thoughts?
 - Actor vamping?
- If anyone wants individual meetings with Dustyn – Thursday or Friday otherwise skype
- Lights
 - Don't need drastic, scene change lights; lots of fades/morphing
- Props
 - Pills=tic tacs
 - Natalie hide pills in tic tac container
 - Sandwiches – how?
 - Hospital bed
 - What scenes? End of act 1?
 - Beginning of act 2
 - Wheeled by how many people?
 - Cot sized – what does it look like? Gurney?
 - Can put diana in chair in doctor office for 1st act instead?
- Thoughts from Dustyn
 - This is a “rock musical.”
 - This is story about a family.
 - This is a story about individuals who often fail themselves and each other.
 - This is a story about mental illness, PTSD, grief, fear, coping, and forgiveness
 - This is a story about hope, about shedding light in the darkness, about the process of rebuilding.

Appendix 7

Example of Rehearsal Report

Taken by Stage Manager Lauren Scott

Next To Normal
REHEARSAL REPORT
 1/27/17

Stage Manager: Lauren Scott

Assistant Stage Managers: Emma Miller, Caitlin Kalsbeek, Franz Schauer

Call Began: 6:32pm Breaks: (See Below) Ended: 10:32pm

Late: Absent:

Rehearsal Breakdown		
Time	What	Who
6:32-7:30	Pg 50-52	Mukta, Nick
7:30-7:36	Vocal warmups	ALL
7:36-9:00	Review Pg 44-52	ALL except Kyle
7:40-8:00	Vocal work	Kyle
9:00-9:12	Scene work	Nick
9:00-10:06	Gonna Be Good movement	ALL except Mukta
9:12-9:35	Character work	Mukta
9:35-10:07	Character work	Mukta, Midge
10:07-10:32	Character work	Mukta, Midge, Nick

General:
Movement:
Orchestra:
Sound:
Set:
Props:
-bag for <u>diana's</u> stuff that she'd have clothes and such in for while she's at hospital
-another folder (<u>dr madden</u>)
-bandages for Diana's hands/wrists
Costumes:
Makeup/Hair:
Lights:

Appendix 8

Rehearsal Journal

Monday, November 28, 5-7pm – Weis Music Building

All six actors were called today.

- I purposely chose to begin rehearsals with our large group numbers
 - This way, I could set a precedent for how rehearsals would be run while I had them all together
 - Additionally, I wanted them to begin bonding as a cast immediately
 - This is a difficult and taxing show, and my actors will have to rely on each other for support throughout this long process
- I began with a “welcome” speech that set cast expectations going forward
 - All actors would work on their music outside of rehearsal as well as during, by recording our sessions and using them to rehearse on their own
 - They would respect each other as artists and people, and remain focused during rehearsals
 - They would not make jokes about their fellow actors’ artistic processes, and would treat each other professionally in rehearsal, regardless of their relationship outside of the show
 - Furthermore, they would be sensitive to the fact that certain themes in this show (depression, bipolar disorder, and attempted suicide), may hit closer to home for some actors than others, and that they would therefore treat the show content with respect as well
 - Lastly, I reminded them that these next two weeks are specifically for learning the immense amount of music in *Next to Normal*, and that blocking and movement rehearsals, along with character work, will begin next semester

I then led a vocal warm-up.

- Many different things are at play while singing
 - The body should be physically aligned
 - I began by having the actors center themselves, balancing their weight so they were leaning on neither their heels nor toes, keeping their knees slightly bent, stacking their neck and head straight on top of their spine, and letting go of any tension in the body
 - Next, breath support is crucial
 - I led an exercise designed to allow breath to flow more easily when the actors sing, which makes their sound smoother and more even
 - This entails having them breathe in on a count of four, and then out on a “hissing” sound for a count of first twenty-five, then thirty
 - I will slowly begin to increase the count as they become more skilled at this exercise

- Finally, there are three different vocal registers that must be warmed up: head, mix, and chest voice
 - Head voice is the highest register, named because that is where the voice seems to resonate in the vocalist's body while singing in this register
 - It is associated with a more classical style of singing
 - While not used much in the music of *Next to Normal*, head voice encourages good technique, which benefits the vocalist overall and can actually strengthen the other vocal registers as well
 - Mix voice is a combination of head and chest, and it is what musical theatre most commonly utilizes.
 - It most resembles a “speaking voice,” and singing in mix can almost sound conversational at times
 - Chest voice is the lowest register, named because the sound seems to resonate in the chest of the vocalist while singing here
 - Belting, a style of singing popular in today's pop and rock music, as well as contemporary musical theatre, comes from chest voice
 - It is hard to use chest voice correctly; I personally have several friends who have damaged their voice from belting without knowledge of how to do so properly.
 - Since this kind of damage can be permanent or require expensive surgery, it is crucial for my actors to learn how to belt properly, as many of their characters, especially those played by Mukta, Midge, and Brendan, do a significant amount of belting in *Next to Normal*
- To warm up the different registers, I led a series of exercises known as “vocalises”
 - This refers to singing a passage on syllables rather than words
 - They can help increase vocal flexibility, allow the singer to focus on a specific register of their voice, or cultivate a specific tone in their singing
 - I used different vocalises for each register
 - For head voice, vocal “trills” and open vowels, such as “ooh” and “ah” make the singer open their soft palate, an area in the back of the mouth that needs space to produce the head voice sound
 - Mix voice benefits from ping-y syllables, such as “may,” which encourages forward resonance and placement in the facial mask
 - For chest voice, I largely use “nyah,” which makes the sound nasal in the vocalises, but which keeps the chest voice from becoming stuck in the throat, which is always a danger
 - To finish, I do a sliding exercise that requires the singer to slide from their chest voice, to their mix voice, to their head voice

- This is important because most musical theatre song utilize more than one vocal register
- My actors need to be able to switch from one to another with ease and agility

After warm-ups, we begin learning music.

- Overall, the goal for these two weeks is to learn notes, rhythms, and harmonies. Next semester, we will focus on interpretation and stylization of the music
- We started with the finale, “Light,” which features all six actors
 - While this song features the intricate and melodic harmonies that songwriting team Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey are known for, it is actually one of the more straightforward pieces in the show
 - There are no prominent key signature or time signature changes, and the melodies and chord progressions fit harmonically with each other
 - Therefore, I thought this song would be a good one to start with, in terms of boosting morale and getting the actors excited to dive into this project. I was proved right.
 - All of the actors picked up their music remarkably quickly. I was especially impressed by Mukta and Midge, who only needed to hear their lines once before holding down their harmonies
- Next, we moved to “Just Another Day,” which is the opening number of the show, and again features all six actors
 - This number proved more difficult to learn, because of the way certain lines of different characters interlock and play off each other
 - Brendan especially had some difficulty with the timing, but after several rounds of repetition he was able to grasp this tricky section
- I had hoped to cover “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” today as well, but we ran out of time. However, I built an hour of review into tomorrow’s rehearsal, so we will take the time instead to learn this third piece.

Overall, I am very pleased with how this first rehearsal went.

- All of the actors seem dedicated and motivated to work hard and practice on their own.
 - I was especially touched by Kyle. During his callback audition, I had worked with him on singing in a more contemporary style of voice, rather than the classical style that he was used to singing in. When he sang for me today, I could tell that he had already been working hard on his own to continue developing his contemporary style. This gave me an extra boost of confidence that he and his fellow actors would do everything in their power to make this production succeed.

Tuesday, November 29, 7-10pm – Weis Music Building

With all six actors called again, we began with warm-ups.

- My warm-up followed the same structure as yesterday: body, breath, and vocalises
 - However, I switched up some of the individual vocalises

- As we get further into the process, I will begin giving them vocalises specifically tailored towards fixing things I hear in their music when they sing
- They seem to enjoy and find helpful two vocalises in particular
 - One starts on a “hmm” sound, which focuses the voice and makes sure that the chords are vibrating properly, and then opens to a “mayo” (pronounced like the condiment abbreviation), which exercises the mix voice, and then proceeds to an “ooh,” which encourages flexibility between the mix and head.
 - The other exercise is the sliding one I introduced them to yesterday, which switches from head to mix to chest
 - Mukta mentioned that she has never worked on a vocalise that switches between registers, and that having the chance to work on this is extremely helpful

After warm-ups, we briefly ran through “Light” and “Just Another Day.”

- I wanted to make sure that none of their harmonies had slipped in the day since they first learned these two numbers.
 - It is necessary to review complicated pieces often until they slip into long-term memory
- Fortunately, the two pieces remained solid.
 - I only needed to review m. 86-89 from “Light,” and the final lines of “Just Another Day.”

Next, we used the hour I had initially set aside for review to learn “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling.”

- This is an exciting song because it incorporates different characters’ themes from earlier songs into one larger number as many of the characters’ conflicts come to a head
- As we worked on this, I noticed that Pasek and Paul have a tendency to write men’s musical lines that stretch the limits of men’s ranges
 - Gabe’s line, especially, is vocally demanding: his character belts a number of A4 notes, which are a full step higher than the belting limits of most tenor ranges
 - While Brendan can hit an A4 with ease in a falsetto, we will either have to work incredibly hard to expand his range to belt an A4, modify the melody line slightly, which is something that music directors often have to do, or accept the falsetto tone
 - Most likely, I will use a mixture of these three strategies

At eight, we started working on “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist and I.”

- I can already tell that this is going to be one of the most challenging numbers in the show
- The rhythms are complicated and shifting, and the harmonies of the different characters often clash with each other
 - Dissonant harmonies are usually the hardest to master
 - The notes are often very close together, which makes it tempting to slide from your actual note to your partner’s note

- Dissonant harmonies often just sound “wrong.” A vocalist needs to be very confident in his or her line
- Furthermore, the lines imitate the jazz style of “scatting,” which is by nature improvisational. However, because four characters are singing the same “scatting” line, I need to make sure they all nail down their specific rhythms
 - Otherwise, the lines will sound messy
- Patrick was having difficulty with the “ba da da” round m. 248-254
 - This is a three-part round, where he, Natalie, and Brendan sing the same line one beat after each other
 - Patrick’s line starts on beat three, and he was having trouble hearing where to come in, and was struggling to stay on his rhythm, often jumping to Brendan’s line
 - I worked to solve this using a clapping and counting exercise, where I had Patrick clap and count beats with me until he got used to hearing where beat three fell in the pattern
 - While he is not consistent quite yet, he is improving in this section
 - Knowing Patrick, I have confidence that he will work dedicatedly outside of rehearsal to master this section before the next time we run this

To finish rehearsal, we learned “Wish I Were Here.”

- This rock anthem features my two women, Mukta and Midge (Diana and Natalie), and uses my men as backup singers
- It also features a constantly changing time signature, as well as the rare time signature of seven-eight
 - Seven-eight time is little used in musical theatre because it is difficult to count and hear. It is not intuitive
 - Six-eight and four-four, the time signatures that surround seven-eight, are both common signatures, and rhythmically easier to master
 - The trap of seven-eight is that many vocalists try to add or subtract an eighth beat from seven-eight to turn it into one of these more intuitive signatures
- As such, I worked first with the women doing clapping and counting exercises to master this time signature. We also spent time circling in their music every instance of a time signature change, so that they would be aware of it while singing
 - Fortunately, they are picking up the seven-eight rhythm rapidly
 - I am especially impressed with how quickly Mukta heard the beats, and how she was able to correct herself the first time she made a mistake
 - This is a good sign because it means she knows what it should sound like, and what she needs to correct
- The men are actually having more difficulty with this song. They have several tricky rhythms and harmonies to master, and are struggling to hold their parts down

- While we did not have enough time today to perfect every section, I can already tell this will be one of the numbers we spend a significant amount of time on with them next semester

Wednesday, November 30, 5-7pm – Weis Music Building

Nick, Midge, Brendan, and Mukta were called today.

- I wanted to focus on the family-centered numbers today, in which Patrick and Kyle do not sing

As usual, we began with warm-ups.

- I have already begun to notice an improvement in their breath work exercises: they can hold a twenty-five count hiss with ease now, and I have begun to challenge them with thirty-five count hisses

After this, we started working on all of the music that only involves these four actors.

- “He’s Not Here/You Don’t Know/I Am The One”
 - I will have to work with Mukta to rein in her voice during parts of this song
 - When she sings an emotional song, she tends to lose control over her voice in terms of volume and pure belting
 - While this will work for small sections of the song, if she sustains it she will exhaust her voice quickly
 - Additionally, an audience can generally sense a loss of control in performance; it will drag them out of the show and make them focus on the actor rather than the character
- “Song of Forgetting”
 - Nick, Midge, and Mukta picked up the gorgeous harmonies in this song extraordinarily quickly, which thrilled me
- “Superboy and the Invisible Girl”
 - This song, which features the characters of Natalie and Gabe is written extraordinarily high for the male voice
 - The actor who originated the role of Gabe on Broadway, Aaron Tveit, has an unusually high belting voice for a tenor
 - I assume that the song lines were written with his voice in mind, as the original cast in shows go through a work-shopping process in which songs are modified and change as they rehearse
 - I will work individually with Brendan next semester to increase his belting range. That failing, I will modify the notes of his lines
 - A falsetto will likely not work here, as it is the climax of the song and requires a belting sound, which Midge is delivering as Natalie
 - If Brendan used his falsetto, the blend of their voices would likely be off
- “I Am The One (Reprise)”

- This reprise, which brings back the melody and some of the lyrics from the earlier iteration of the song, is rather brief, and features only Nick and Brendan, who were able to breeze through it quickly
 - Since they had learned their notes and harmonies earlier, it was more a matter of reviewing the new words and slightly slower tempo
- This gave us time to review “He’s Not Here/You Don’t Know/I Am The One” before I dismissed Brendan and Midge to work solely with Nick and Mukta, who play husband and wife in the show

For the last half hour of rehearsal, I worked with Nick and Mukta on “A Light in the Dark” and “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise).”

- Since “A Light in the Dark” is a relatively straightforward number, we were able to focus mainly on the more challenging “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)”
 - This song features a harmony that consists solely of half-steps, the most dissonant harmony in the book
 - Due to the notes living so close to each and sounding, so to speak, so “crunchy,” it is difficult to maintain this harmony
 - It took a good deal of running this number to nail down the lines, and I am fairly certain we will have to run it many more times next semester

Thursday, December 1, 7-10pm – Weis Music Building

Today, Nick, Mukta, Midge, Patrick, and Brendan were called to start, as Kyle had a prior rehearsal conflict for the first two hours.

- This ended up working out perfectly, however, as there were several songs in the show that only involved these five, so we were able to work productively without wasting time.

We began again with vocal warm-ups.

- We focused today on the idea of vocal onset
 - Onset refers to the start of a note
 - A good onset is clean and effortless
 - Without training, however, an onset can sound breathy, glottal, or have a wind up to it, in which the singer almost begins the note in the back of their throat before they actually open their mouth to sing
- A good way to think about onset is to just imagine your vocal folds coming gently together to create the sound
- To practice, I had them work vocalises on a simple “ooh”
 - It was difficult for them, especially for Patrick, who kept trying to “wind up” to the sound
 - We will continue practicing this vocalise going forward

After warm-ups, I taught them “Seconds And Years,” “Better Than Before,” “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling (Reprise),” and “You Don’t Know (Reprise).”

- We were able to move through these pieces relatively quickly, especially as two of them were reprises, so the actors were already familiar with the melody

- One thing I have noticed is that Nick is struggling a bit with the rhythmic patterns of this contemporary rock music
 - Nick has largely performed in classical musicals, and he is not used to how many of the notes in this music fall on the off-beats of measures
 - I was able to work intensely with him today on this, and he acknowledged that he is struggling a bit with these rhythms, but knows what he has to work on
 - I had him start circling all the places in his music where he is shaky on the rhythms

Although it wasn't previously on the schedule, we had some extra time before Kyle came at nine, so we began learning "It's Gonna Be Good."

- Due to the rapid tempo of the song, as well as the intricate harmonies, the actors definitely struggled learning this one
 - There is one section ("G, O, O, D, good") in particular where the notes of the actors are so closely placed and so staccato that they barely have time to register if they are hitting the correct note before they move onto the next one
 - Therefore, we spent at least fifteen minutes working simply on this one line
- I'm glad that we were able to start work on this song today, because I can tell that we would not have been able to learn the entire piece in the original rehearsal time I had allotted

At nine, Kyle arrived and I dismissed everyone except for him and Nick, as planned.

- I taught them "A Promise," a duet that immediately follows as a response to Natalie and Diana's "Why Stay?"
 - Kyle is doing very well with his new style of contemporary singing. The only time I notice his classical training coming out is on his "ooh" vowels, which are too rounded to sound realistic, and occasionally on the consonant "r," which he softens. This would work in a choral setting, but as a solo voice sounds unnatural.
 - Luckily, Kyle picks up on when he is doing this and quickly corrects himself. Soon, he will not make these mistakes in the first place
- Next, I taught Kyle his part of "It's Gonna Be Good," to catch him up to the other actors
 - This went fairly quickly, because he is not yet practicing his harmonies against the other actors, and because I was able to focus solely on him during this time

Friday, December 2, 5-7pm – Weis Music Building

Today, only Midge, Henry, and Mukta were called, to focus on the duets between Natalie and Henry, and Natalie and Diana.

After our usual warm-up, we began with Natalie and Henry's "Perfect For You," and a trio of duets they sing labeled "Hey #1-3."

- The “Hey” numbers actually proved challenging for the actors to learn, because they are just similar enough in melody that when they do vary from each other, I kept having to drill the differences to make sure Midge and Kyle didn’t mistake one for the other

Next, we ran Natalie’s “Everything Else.”

- Midge had clearly already worked on this solo on her own, which I was pleased to find
- One thing I am excited to play with in this song is the idea of control
 - Natalie is an uptight, straight-A student who loves classical music because every note is exact. However, during the course of this song she struggles to maintain control of her emotions, which burst to the surface at the climax of the piece
 - I want to play with the rigidity of Natalie’s notes. At the start of the song, I want Midge to adhere to exactly what is written on the page. However, as her character starts to lose control, I am curious to see what would happen if I allowed Midge to become more loose with her rhythms to mirror this.

We finished with Natalie and Diana’s duets, “Why Stay?”, “Maybe (Next to Normal),” and with a review of “Wish I Were Here.”

- “Why Stay?” is a challenge for the same reason “Wish I Were Here” is: shifting time signatures and a recurrence of the seven-eight pattern, along with a fast tempo
 - Luckily, both Midge and Mukta are very musical, and were able to pick up the piece in spite of this
- “Maybe (Next to Normal)” is fortunately a straightforward number
 - Although Diana and Natalie sing to each other, they do not sing together here, so there were no harmonies to teach
- I was happy that Mukta requested to review “Wish I Were Here” as well, which I had not originally planned to review until Sunday
 - They are still having trouble getting into the seven-eight rhythm
 - They need to run it once with me counting the beats before they can do it themselves
 - This will be a matter of running it until they get this time signature into their bodies

Sunday, December 4, 2:30-6 – Weis Music Building

Patrick was called alone for the first half-hour of rehearsal today.

- We worked on his “Doctor Rock” riff, which is only three lines
- Riffing is by nature improvisational, so it was funny teaching Patrick a specific series of notes written for the riff. However, I am planning on letting him play around with it, so that he can make it his own for the show

I had scheduled everyone for the first hour and a half of rehearsal, blocking it off as “Review As Necessary.”

- This turned out to be an important block of time, because while we did use it to review “Light,” “Just Another Day,” “My Psychopharmacologist And I,” and “Wish I Were Here,” we also used the block of time to learn more of “It’s Gonna Be Good.”

- This is shaping up to be our most difficult song in the show
- The harmonies are not intuitive, and the actors are struggling to stay on pitch and in time
- Since the actors were solid on their notes and rhythms, I was able to dive more deeply into “Light”
 - During the piano section m. 86-89 (“Let it, let it...”), while the notes were there, the energy of the song was falling flat
 - This often happens during softer sections of high-energy or emotional pieces
 - Actors equate volume with energy, not realizing that more energy and control is required to sing softly
 - To remedy this, I had them do a “pulling” exercise that I learned from the Department of Music, and that I have used in my a cappella group many times
 - The actors stand with their feet wider apart than normal, and bend their knees to stand in a light squat
 - As they sing the lines, they imagine that the notes are flowing past them, like they are paddling down a river of notes
 - Every time they change notes, they use their arms and hands to “pull” the notes past them
 - Although part of this is a mental exercise for the actors, the quality of their sound instantly improved after they did this exercise
 - I asked them if they could hear the difference. They did, and made notes to use this exercise in the future if they felt their energy slipping again
- To finish the review, Nick and Brendan ran through “I’ve Been.”
 - Nick is starting to improve with his contemporary rhythms
 - They are still not intuitive to him, and he has to concentrate hard to get them down right now, but if he continues to drill over break he will soon get them into his body

After the review session, I dismissed everyone except for Nick and Mukta, to teach “How Could I Ever Forget,” and to review “A Light In The Dark” and “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise).”

- “How Could I Ever Forget” is a gentle piece that involves Diana and Dan’s lines playing off each other in rounds, and then meeting for delicate harmonies.
 - Many of the harmonies are in thirds, which are generally the most straightforward harmonies to learn
 - The only tricky section was in m. 60-62 (“The day that I lost you – it’s clear as the day we met.”), in which Nick has a double-flat harmony that he was having trouble landing. However, after drilling it a few times and clarifying that a

double-flat means that you sing the written note two half-steps down, he was able to pick it up.

- I was very pleasantly surprised to find that “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)” was still in good shape
 - I was expecting to have to review the challenging half-step harmonies, but Nick and Mukta had remained solid on them

Monday, December 5, 5-6pm – Weis Music Building

Brendan and Mukta were called today to learn Gabe and Diana’s solos and duets.

Brendan learned “I’m Alive,” “I’m Alive (Reprise),” “There’s A World,” “Aftershocks,” and “Music Box.”

- The biggest challenge for “I’m Alive” was that Brendan wants to sing exactly what Aaron Tveit did on the original cast recording of *Next to Normal*, which interferes at points both with what is written on the page and with his own artistic interpretation of the character.
 - I told him to stop listening to the cast album from now until the show closes
 - This will allow us to create our own interpretation of the pieces
- We will also work on the belted high notes at the end of “I’m Alive,” which are drawn out and repetitive and could strain Brendan’s vocal chords if not sung correctly
- I taught “There’s A World,” which Brendan had already partially learned for his callback, without incident. The same went for “Music Box,” which is just two lines of Gabe’s character humming a melody.
- “Aftershocks” is challenging because of the dramatic speed and tempo changes of the song, but the notes themselves are repetitive and easily within Brendan’s range, so we were still able to move through the piece with relative ease

Mukta and I then went over “I Miss The Mountains,” “I Dreamed A Dance,” “Didn’t I See This Movie?,” “The Break,” and “So Anyway.”

- Mukta had already learned a good portion of “I Miss The Mountains” for her callback, so we were able to run through it without incident
- “The Break” is challenging simply because of the speed with which Mukta must say her lines
 - She was tripping over her words trying to get through the lines
 - This is something that memorization will solve

Overall, I am pleased with how the past week has gone. We were able to cover a vast amount of material in a very short time (The only piece we were unable to finish was “It’s Gonna Be Good.”).

One thing I have noticed is that there are some discrepancies between my piano-conductor score and the scores of the actors. Throughout the week, I would occasionally be teaching a harmony when one of the actors would say, “That’s not what we have written here.” I would then compare the two copies and pick the harmony that I preferred, either fixing it

in my score or writing it into theirs. While a little frustrating, it has not truly impeded the process so far.

Sunday, January 15, 12-7:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today was our first day working with the full cast, stage management team, and stage director, Dustyn.

- It was also our first day in the space that we will eventually perform in, the Tustin black box
- Our set is already marked out in tape on the ground, so that the actors and directors can begin to visualize the space in which they will be working

Since we would begin with a read- and sing-through of the entire show, I began rehearsal with a vocal warm-up.

- Today, instead of having them center down as I usually do, balancing themselves and making sure their bodies are aligned before they begin to sing, I had them walk around the room at different paces and explore their bodies as they walked
 - I took an excellent workshop with a musical theatre professor over winter break, and as he pointed out, musical theatre actors are never simply standing still in perfect posture when they sing. They are dancing, or sitting, or interacting with the set and other actors. Therefore, actors need to train their bodies to sing with strong technique when in these situations.
- I started them with a pinched lip trill as usual, to get their vocal resonance flowing
- Following that, we went through a series of vocalises focused primarily on mix and belt, and the transition between the two, as those are the registers most required for *Next to Normal*
 - I used the syllables “nyah” and “why,” which forces the sound into the buzzy nasal cavity and out of the throat
 - I also used the vocalise that transitions from chest, to mix, to head, on a “may,” that the actors found helpful during our fall semester music rehearsals

After warming up, the read-through commenced.

- The fascinating thing about *Next to Normal* is that the plot is dominated by and propelled by the songs in the show. Unlike in many shows, where action and plot are halted for a musical number, the songs *are* the action
 - They are fully integrated into the show
 - Even when there are spoken lines, they are often contained within the music of the show
- I was nervous that the cast would forget a significant portion of the music over break, but for the most part, they retained their music, which was a relief
 - I could tell especially that Brendan and Patrick had been practicing

- Patrick successfully and confidently sang the part of “My Psychopharmacologist And I” that he had been struggling with previously – the “Use may be fatal” round
 - Brendan overall was stronger on his harmonies as well
- Kyle is still fighting his classic sound for Henry’s contemporary pieces
- Areas that need work
 - The area of “Just Another Day” beginning with Diana’s “It only hurts...” at m. 158
 - Mukta is having trouble hearing her entrance, and is jumping in a half-beat too early
 - The harmonies in general also need some refreshing
 - “It’s Gonna Be Good” needs help in general, as we did not finish learning it last semester, and the incredibly fast tempo of this song makes it difficult for the actors to catch their mistakes
 - The multiple lines of “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” m. 103-120
 - Nick especially struggled with his harmonies and rhythms here
 - Overall, I was a little concerned with Nick in today’s sing-through. As a jazz singer, I believe that he is used to being able to play with rhythms and melodies of the pieces he sings. However, I need to drill these pieces into him, because there is not as much freedom to rewrite the melodies and music of musical theatre. He was taking a lot of liberties today.
 - “How Could I Ever Forget?” and “A Light In The Dark” especially need work
- Today was also the first time I played through the entire show in one sitting. It was a little terrifying, but fortunately we got through with no major blunders.

Following the read-through, we took a short break, then came back to do table work, where we discussed expectations, our ideas for the show, and character and theme exploration.

- In terms of expectations, I made it clear that they need to be singing every day for at least an hour outside of rehearsal, including warming themselves up and practicing technique.
 - This is the only way to strengthen their voices
 - Otherwise, they will not be able to sustain their voices for the vocally demanding run of this show
 - I did this during the run of *Spring Awakening*, and my voice had strengthened immensely by performance weekend
- Ideas that stuck out to me from Dustyn’s discussion and presentation
 - This is a story about individuals who often fail themselves and each other
 - But this is also a story about hope and forgiveness
 - I am excited to explore the musical arc of each character
 - For example, Dan’s songs go from structured to a collapse

- Diana's songs mirror her highs and lows
- Does Henry represent stability because he is the only character with a "theme," so to speak?

- The notion of what is kept inside versus what is shown outside

After table work, we took our dinner break, then came back for ensemble building and character exploration, led by Dustyn.

- Dustyn encouraged everyone to lean into their impulses, and to release tension by doing so
- The actors walked through the space as their characters, exploring their impulses
 - I noticed that Midge instinctively stuck to straight lines of movement. She was drawn to lines that already existed on the floor. This fits Natalie.
 - Mukta swirled around the space in great sweeping patterns, reminiscent of Diana.
- The actors are already working together extraordinarily well. There is a strong level of trust there. I cannot wait to see this continued collaboration going forward.

Monday, January 16, 10-4:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began with movement to music.

- The actors moved through the space first as themselves, then as their characters, as I played different classical pieces on the piano
 - They had to follow the music, and let it influence them
- While I played, they also created still tableaux as their characters
 - Finding moments of stillness is crucial for this rock-based, frenetic show
- This transitioned into verb work. Dustyn would give me a verb, such as "to uncover," "to bury," "to assemble," and I improvised on that on the piano. In turn, the actors let my music influence their actions and movement
 - Through this, we explored relationships and the roles of the characters
 - What are some archetypes we could work with?
 - This was fascinating because just as the actors were discovering new sides of these verbs through movement, I was discovering the same through my playing
 - For example, for the verb "to bury," I began my improvisation in a dark, minor key, because the verb felt secretive. However, I soon found myself transitioning into a bright major key.
 - When I explored this impulse, I realized that when we bury something, we often mask it beneath a positive, bright exterior.
 - This clarified to me why Dan's song "It's Gonna Be Good" is in a chipper, major key, reminiscent of a television sitcom jingle. He is burying his fears below the surface and forcing himself to be cheerful.

In the afternoon, I led an exploration of acting the song, working with each actor one-on-one.

- I gave each actor a portion of one of their songs to work with

- Midge – “Superboy And The Invisible Girl”
- Mukta – “I Miss The Mountains”
- Nick – “I Am The One”
- Brendan – “I’m Alive”
- Kyle – “Perfect For You”
- Patrick – “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling (Reprise)”
- I then followed this format for each actor
 - I asked them what their song was about, and why they were singing it
 - I was looking for playable, specific objectives here, rather than broad, overarching emotions that are difficult to act upon
 - Next, they spoke their song as a monologue
 - This jolts them out of getting caught in the music and rhyme scheme of the piece, and into thinking about actually creating character and acting through the music
 - After this, they sang their song while I played the accompaniment on the piano
 - Following this, I dove into getting them thinking about why the music of their song is the way it is
 - For example, if there is an abrupt change in the chord progression, what might that be saying about what is happening in the scene?
 - It could signify an external event, or a change in tactics to achieve the character’s objective
 - Or, why is a particular word of a song a held note, while others are short and quick?
 - How does the time signature of the piece affect the acting of it?
 - Once I got them thinking about this, we ran through the song again
- The four actors we got to today before time ran out found this exercise extremely helpful, as the acting of a song is not something we necessarily think about that often
- We made some major breakthroughs and discoveries today
 - Midge found a more specific objective for herself
 - Before, she was playing the objective that she wanted more attention from her family, and that she wished her brother had never been born. This was too broad to be able to act upon in her specific song.
 - We narrowed this into her wanting an apology from her mother in that moment.
 - We also played with varying the different registers of her voice
 - She had been belting the whole song, and I encouraged her to incorporate mix to add texture and depth
 - The challenge I gave Nick was to find a different reason for each time he says the phrase “I am the one.” It is so repetitive that there is a reason the composers created the song this way.

- The trap of Mukta's "I Miss The Mountains" is that the actress can easily fall into playing self-pity, which is not a strong choice for an audience to watch. Instead, we worked with her finding joy in her words, which actually achieved the objective of making it more heart-breaking for us.
- For Brendan, we worked with the objective that he is fighting to be remembered, and that a song that starts out as a seduction transitions to aggressive desperation as the music changes in the chorus.
- We still have a long way to go in terms of these songs, but today was a very solid start to exploring character through them.

Tuesday, January 17, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began with vocal warm-ups.

- I focused today on creating an open, released sound, which is harder to accomplish than it sounds
 - Singers, especially MT singers, tend to push when they sing higher notes, to generate the maximum amount of volume possible
 - This can sound forced and unpleasant to a listener, and could potentially damage the voice if sustained for a long period of time
 - Instead, I had them sing an "ooh" vocalise while biting down on their finger
 - The closed space in the front of the mouth actually opens a backspace in the soft palate, creating a rounder, easier sound

After warming up, we reviewed and work-shopped "Just Another Day."

- I was grateful that for the most part they remembered all of their melodies and harmonies, because it allowed me to go in-depth into shaping the song
- General notes for all the actors
 - Growing notes
 - Whenever a note is held for more than a quarter beat, the actor should either crescendo or decrescendo into it
 - A sustained flat note is boring to listen to, while a growing note captures the audience's attention
 - Having listened to many cast recordings of different shows, this is something most professionals do
 - Diction and consonant placement
 - I had them over-enunciate phrases such as "It's just another day," which happen very quickly. If the consonants are not bitten, the audience will miss what was said.
 - We also practiced placing the final s on "It hurts" so that everyone was landing in the same spot
 - Even phrasing

- Some of the verses were getting choppy, with the lines sounding like individual words instead of phrases
 - They spoke the sentences to me, and then sang them with the cadence that they spoke them, which helped
 - What lines are important?
 - We spoke briefly about which lines for each character are crucial to that character, and should be brought out, so that everything is not at a maximum volume
 - Never sing using more than seventy percent of your voice
 - This is the opening number. If they come in full-force now, they will have nowhere to go
- Individual notes
 - Mukta
 - We fixed a few wrong notes at the beginning
 - Otherwise, she is taking notes well and immediately incorporating them into her singing, such as phrasing and growing notes
 - Midge
 - Midge has a tendency to want to belt all the time, so I pulled her back and used her mix voice, which is perfect for the opening number
 - Since she and I have worked with growing notes before, she was very helpful in demonstrating this technique to the other actors
 - We also found places for her to decrescendo in her lines
 - Nick
 - Nick also wanted to sing full-force on lines that were not as meaningful to his character
 - Once we toned down his volume, he blended significantly better with Brendan and Mukta
 - He is not quite grasping the concept of growing notes. I will work with him individually going forward
 - Brendan
 - Brendan's voice was rough today. He cracked a few times
 - However, I did work on his belted G
 - He has a tendency to strain his head forward when he belts high, which actually tenses his throat muscles and stops the sound
 - I had him push the back of his head into my hand, and to think of the sound rolling back and bouncing off the top of his head
 - At the same time, I had him squat to engage his lower abdominals, and to attempt to lift the piano, which does the same
 - After a few tries, the G came out much more solidly. He just needs to keep practicing this going forward

- Additionally, we fixed a harmony on “‘cause what doesn’t kill me doesn’t kill me, so fill me up for just another day,” m. 127-132.

Wednesday, January 18, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After beginning with our usual warm-up, we reviewed “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I.”

- Nick wants to lag on “And I was a wild twenty-five/And I loved a wife so alive...” at m. 35-42
 - He is having trouble feeling the contemporary off-beats of this section
- Additionally, I worked with Nick on acting his vocal lines more than singing them
 - Since Nick’s background is in classical musical theatre, he is not used to this integrated style of singing
- Patrick is still struggling to hear his “ba da da” line at m. 248-254
 - He wants to jump onto Brendan’s line
 - We went back to clapping and counting it out, and he eventually picked it up again
- Scatting lines need to be more phrased
- The biggest difficulty was a rhythm and counting error on the line “Anxiousness, anger, exhaustion, insomnia, irritability, nausea, vomiting,” m. 154-157
 - The actors were feeling this in triplets, because of the three four time signature of the piece, and were therefore speeding through the song and finishing their lines too early
 - This section is actually in a simple “one and two and three and” pattern
 - This was an extreme challenge to correct, because the triplet pattern was already ingrained in their brains
 - Eventually, I had to clap it out for them in slow motion to begin to get them on the right track
- On a positive note, I love what Mukta is doing with her voice for this song. She has really taken the “growing notes” note to heart. She also has a lilting quality to her voice for this that works well for this song.

We then moved onto working “Everything Else,” Natalie’s solo, with Midge.

- Why Mozart?
 - When playing Mozart, his musical lines are fascinating and complicated, but there is no room for improvisation
 - Unlike a romantic composer, like Chopin, Mozart is rigid in that you must play what is on the page. You cannot take liberties with the tempo or with your expression of the piece
 - It controls you. Natalie likes this
- There is a music shift at m. 33, “And you play ‘til it’s perfect...” though m. 48 from a classical Mozart style into a more contemporary pulsing beat

- This deviation signifies Natalie's loss of control, a break from her strict routine
- It is almost like a drug for her, a fix
- Natalie is trying to fit an identity that's not her
- Midge needs to be careful to not "sing the accompaniment," so to speak
 - The accompaniment is percussive so she doesn't have to be

Thursday, January 19, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After our usual warm-up, I worked with Kyle and Midge on "Perfect For You."

- Kyle has made fantastic progress
 - His major challenge has been overcoming his classical training and learning to sing in a contemporary style
 - Before we began working, he sang in a choral tone, which does not match the music of *Next to Normal*
- We had a huge breakthrough today when he was able to sing all of "Perfect For You" in a style that matched his speaking voice
 - What worked
 - Speaking the line, then singing it using similar inflections to when it was spoken
 - Emphasizing the hard "r" sound of words like "perfect"
 - Singing lines on a "nyah" syllable to bring his "ooh" vowel into a more forward placement
 - Getting him out of his own head by having him run around the room while singing

Next, I worked with Nick on "I've Been."

- A big challenge for Nick as well is that his background is in classic musical theatre and jazz, which are drastically different from contemporary musical theatre
 - I worked with him on speak-singing to find a more contemporary sound, and using straight tone instead of just vibrato
- We discussed where changes in the music occur, and why those happen
 - For example, why is the very end of the song ("I've never been alone") written with a drastically different melody from the rest of it?
 - Why is the middle portion of the song with the riffing so lifted melodically?
 - Could have to do with escapism, especially when Gabe enters.
 - What does Gabe represent?
- I also worked with Nick to break his speech patterns and get him into Dan's objectives throughout the song
 - He read his lines as a monologue
 - We also did a variation of a Meisner repetition technique, in which he said a line, I repeated it back to him, and we kept doing this until he found different nuances in the line. Then we moved to the next line.

- I then had him sing the song to me and convince me of Dan's point of view through it.

Friday, January 20, 3-4pm – Weis Music Building

Kyle requested a one-on-one session to work on his pieces more individually.

- We focused on “Hey #3/Perfect For You (Reprise)” and worked the contrast between when he speak-sings and when he can actually sing
 - The beginning is very “talk-y,” and requires more of a spoken tone than a pure vocal sound
 - It is only when he gets to the “perfect for you” refrain that he can start singing in earnest
- To bring Kyle's falsetto into a place of more forward resonance, I had him flip over and sing upside down, which puts the resonance in his facial mask
 - This worked very well. His challenge this week will be to replicate the sound while standing up
- Another challenge for Kyle is to relax his facial muscles
 - He tends to clench his jaw when he sings, which is unnecessary for the tone
 - We practiced releasing tension today
 - Additionally, I had him focus on keeping his eyes fully open while he sings, as he tends to want to close them halfway out of habit

Friday, January 20, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

I started with Brendan and Mukta today.

- Since I knew I would be working individually today with Brendan, whose songs are very high for the male voice, I concentrated on warming up the upper ranges of his voice
- I used the technique of flipping over and singing on a nasally vocalise
 - To Brendan's great surprise, he was able to hit a C, which is several notes higher than he can usually hit
 - This shows to me that when he sings normally, he holds a lot of tension in his throat, which restricts the sound

Next, Brendan and I worked “I'm Alive.”

- The difficulty of this song is that it requires sustained belting in the upper ranges of the tenor voice, which could put a lot of strain on Brendan's vocal chords
- I had him greatly pull back during the opening portions of the song, as he does not need to exhaust his voice in the beginning lower notes
- We focused mainly on technique as well, using different vocalises to strengthen his higher notes
 - I also discussed how when belting, especially when high belting, we never use just our chest voice. It is actually a mix, and we can incorporate different amounts of head and chest to adjust how we want to sound

- The main thing for Brendan is that he has to work this on his own, for at least an hour every day, to strengthen his voice and achieve consistency

Sunday, January 22, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

I began with Nick and Mukta, working on “How Could I Ever Forget?”

- Both of their vocals are coming along beautifully for this piece, so I focused on activating the song
- Before, we had looked at the song as Diana reflecting on and reliving the death of her son. However, I asked her to try the song as a monologue using the objective of forcing Dan to remember that night as well
 - This lent an urgency to the song, and made it active instead of passive
- We also discussed how the song is just as much about the disintegration of Dan and Diana’s relationship as it is about the loss of their son
 - The switch from thinking of that day in the hospital to “The day that I lost you – it’s clear as the day we met.”
- We also discussed the idea of guilt
 - How much do Dan and Diana blame themselves for Gabe’s death? How does this affect them?

We then had a major breakthrough working “Superboy And The Invisible Girl” with Midge and Brendan.

- Midge is doing a great job pulling back at the beginning and letting the song build naturally
- I worked with her on making her mouth tall, instead of wide, when she belts
 - This rounded out the sound and made it easier for her to sing and more pleasant for the audience to listen to
- Brendan made huge progress today, which I am thrilled about
 - At first, he was still struggling belting f’s, and could only falsetto the g’s
 - I then had him flip upside and sing on a “nyah” syllable
 - Following that, I had him push as hard as he could against my hand while still singing on a “nyah”
 - This forces the abdominal muscles to engage, the ones needed to belt properly with support
 - Incredibly, he belted the f’s with ease and the g’s as well
 - We switched to words, and after working it a couple times, Brendan even belted an A!
 - This is the first time he has been able to do that
 - He was stunned and excited, and knows what he needs to do to strengthen this going forward

Towards the end of rehearsal, I reviewed “Better Than Before” with Nick, Mukta, and Midge.

- They are landing the ending harmonies solidly, which I am ecstatic about because some of the chords are not particularly intuitive to the ear
- The only part in which there was an issue was Diana's line, "Gonna get back what I lost there. Gonna find out who I was" (m. 89-90).
 - Mukta was having trouble hearing her melodic line
 - She wanted to go down to an F natural, even though the chords progression and the written lyric line required an F sharp
 - It took several rounds of repetition for her to process the line melody

Monday, January 23, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

I blocked two hours at the start of rehearsal to finish learning "It's Gonna Be Good" and to review "Wish I Were Here."

- "It's Gonna Be Good" is proving to be a huge challenge to learn, because of both the sheer speed of the song and the tricky rhythms and harmonies
- Brendan especially is getting frustrated with himself because he is having trouble picking up his harmonies and counts
- I was not able to shape the song at all today because it took almost the full two hours to hammer down the notes and rhythms
 - To help them, I had them say their notes on the counts they came in on
 - For example, if the line was "It's gonna be good," instead of saying the lyrics they would say "two and three and four..." to get comfortable with where they entered
 - I also had them speak their lyrics to get the rhythms without having to worry about the notes
- "Wish I Were Here" was similarly challenging because of the changing meter and tight harmonies. Fortunately, I could tell that they had been rehearsing this, and we were able to review it more quickly because of this.
 - Mukta and Midge have done an excellent job rehearsing their harmonies for this. We are almost to the point where we can stop focusing on the rhythms and start getting into the text and musicality of the piece.

Later in the evening, we ran "Who's Crazy?/My Psychopharmacologist And I."

- This went extraordinarily well.
- I could tell that they had practiced since the last time we ran this, because they had incorporated all of the notes I had given them, and even fixed the triplet into three-four section.
- After a difficult run of "It's Gonna Be Good," this was an excellent way to end the evening.

Tuesday, January 24, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, after warm-up, we worked on "Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I'm Falling."

- Patrick is having trouble with the meter at the beginning
 - It is in three-four time, but the piano accompaniment plays against this meter a bit, which is throwing him off
 - I had to clap the meter many times with the accompaniment track to get him on the right track.
- The harmonies on “catch me I’m falling, flying headfirst into space” are actually beautifully intact. I was impressed and grateful that the cast had clearly been practicing this section.
- Brendan is having difficulty with rhythm for his “I’m Alive” section of the multi-part portion.
 - He is consistently coming in a beat too early
 - I had him write his beat counts into his score, which seemed to help. The challenge will be him holding his own when everyone gets off-book on Friday.

Wednesday, January 25, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, I began by working “Hey #1-3” with Kyle and Midge.

- These are three separate short songs that follow the same melodic theme, showcasing different moments in Henry and Natalie’s relationship during Act II.
- I worked with both Kyle and Midge on connecting with each other.
 - When singing, both have a tendency to focus more on singing the song correctly than on acting and creating a believable connection with each other onstage
 - I had them speak the song as dialogue to each other, so they could hear where their cadences naturally fall and how they would actually react to each other in this kind of conversation
- I also worked with Kyle on where he is allowed to “sing nicely,” and where he needs to sing in a more conversational tone
 - This is a challenge for him, as in classical musical theatre there is the tendency to sing everything out, loudly and beautifully
 - However, he has made huge strides in his contemporary style, and quickly adapted to my direction

I then moved onto working with Mukta and Brendan on “I Dreamed A Dance.”

- Mukta sang this beautifully
- She incorporated the idea of “growing notes” into this simple waltz, so that every held note lilts and swells wistfully
- The only challenge I face with her is keeping this from turning into a “self-pity” or mournful song. I want to explore the moments of joy that Diana finds dreaming of Gabe instead, which in a way makes the song even more heartbreaking.

Thursday, January 26, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, I began by working “Didn’t I See This Movie” with Mukta.

- One of the biggest challenges Mukta faces as an actor is that she tends to give herself completely over to the music
 - This results in her singing at full volume, occasionally increasing the tempo, and losing control of the song
- My challenge for her was to figure out how to keep control of herself as an actor, even as her character spirals out of control
 - We worked on channeling her emotions into her voice and facial expressions, rather than through large physical gesture

Next, I worked “I’ve Been” and “A Light In The Dark” with Nick.

- Nick is having a lot of troubling memorizing the lyrics, which is troubling, as tomorrow is the off-book date, where the actors should be memorized
- However, he has made a lot of progress singing in the contemporary style of the show
- Nick’s challenge for “A Light In The Dark” is that he has a tendency to want to sing each word separately, instead of thinking about the phrasing of his lyrics
 - To counteract this, I had him speak each sentence to me, then sing it, so that he could hear the difference and where his natural pauses and breaks fall

Friday, January 27, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today, I worked “Perfect For You” with Kyle during a free half hour, while Dustyn blocked a scene with the rest of the cast.

- I am so proud of Kyle’s progress in the past couple weeks
- In this run-through of “Perfect For You,” he incorporated all of the notes I have given him about consonant and vowel placement for a contemporary sound, speak-singing versus full singing, and acting the song
- This gave me confidence that he was be able to do the same for “Hey #1-3”

The rest of rehearsal was spent integrating the vocals and blocking of “I’ve Been” through “A Light In The Dark.”

- The most challenging part of this was timing the dialogue vamps between songs with the prerecorded tracks
- Since these particular songs and their interludes are written to flow into one another, there is not a lot of wiggle room in terms of timing the dialogue
- The actors will need to speed up their reaction time to each other’s lines without rushing through them in order to make this timing work

Sunday, January 29, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Today was our “stumble-through” of Act I. We began with a vocal warm-up and an hour of review.

- After our usual warm-up of vocalises and diction exercises, I started with “It’s Gonna Be Good”
 - The harmonies, especially Kyle and Brendan’s, keep slipping

- I reminded them that it wastes time to keep refreshing notes, and to start recording our work sessions to practice on their own
- Patrick also consistently misses his “ring” entrance
 - He thinks it comes a beat later than it does
- Brendan is having significant trouble with his “good” lines at the end of the song
 - No matter how many times we clap and count it, he is not landing on the beats with any consistency
 - I worked it under-tempo to try to help him, but he needs to put in the work for this song outside of rehearsal as much as he practices his solos
- We moved onto “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling”
 - This number is actually in decent shape
 - Patrick finally has the timing down for the opening, and is leaning into the acting more as well
 - The harmonies are also solid, even during the more difficult end section
 - The trick part will be timing the song with the vamps
 - Nick and Midge both have specifically timed entrances that will be hard to land without counting the number of vamps (something tricky to accomplish in a scene)
- After this, we worked “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I”
 - The actors have really taken my dynamic notes to heart, which is fantastic to see
 - They have learned to control their volume and airflow
 - In some places, I actually had them give me more volume, which is an easier problem to fix than the other way around
 - This time, “Anxiousness, anger...” was actually slow, which has never happened before
 - This makes me apprehensive – I wonder if they have actually learned the double pattern as opposed to the triplet or if they have just been guessing at the correct tempo
- Finally, we had just enough time to run “Just Another Day”
 - Brendan very pleasantly surprised me today by riff-belting up to a B, which he has never done before
 - He is able to do this when he remembers to keep his head aligned, rather than pushing it forward as he is constantly tempted to do
 - The “bum, bum, bum” section needs help
 - The actors are missing their cues for this, so we will work the timing for this when we have more review time
 - The ending section also got a bit messy

After vocal review, we moved onto the “Stumble Through.”

- Overall, we survived the run in decent shape

- There were a few mistimed vamps, but that will improve as they more strongly memorize their lines
- One of my biggest concerns is the number of times actors dropped lyrics tonight
 - After the run, I reminded them that they have had this music since November, which means that there is no excuse to not know the words of their songs, especially their solos
- I took notes during the show (see “Song Notes For Actors”) which I delivered after the run. Dustyn delivered her notes as well.

Monday, January 30, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began with two hours dedicated to vocal review.

- After warming up the cast, I began with “Just Another Day.”
 - During the stumble through, I found that the ending was being rushed, and that the actors were not sure where to enter on their “bum bum bum” lines, so I worked these sections
 - Mukta was coming in a sixteenth too early for “It only hurts when...” which was throwing the rhythm and tempo of the song off. To correct this, I had her stomp on the downbeat before she sang, which prevented her from jumping in too quickly
 - I started having the actors work on counting their own vamps, instead of me cueing them to enter, so that they can start getting a better feel for the timing
- Following this, we worked “It’s Gonna Be Good”
 - The actors, especially the men, are still struggling with notes and rhythms here
 - I had them take out their phones and record their parts while I played them, because I reminded them that after giving the same note many times, I expect them to know it
 - Hopefully having a recording of their parts will help them practice
 - Brendan is still spotty on the time for his “good” sequence at the end
 - I am still having to aggressively clap out his rhythms here
 - On the bright side, the challenging harmonies on “eat and talk and laugh and joke my family and me” are in good shape
 - Brendan and Patrick also finally got the timing down for their first “Ring”
- Next, we ran “Light,” which we hadn’t touched in a while
 - We are finally at a place with this piece where I can shape and craft very specific moments
 - For example, working certain crescendos and decrescendos during “shine” and “sun”
 - A new moment I added was a straight tone to vibrato on the final “There will be light.”
 - The actors are naturally doing a crescendo there

- I had them hold a straight tone for four counts, then release into vibrato
 - The effect was chilling
- We then moved onto “Wish I Were Here”
 - Midge and Mukta are in strong shape
 - They have mastered the seven-eight time signature, which I am thrilled about, and have corrected the difficulty they were having with the seven-eight to three-four to four-four transition
 - Midge has a beautiful vocal slide on “...fills me with desire” that I love as well
 - The men are still having trouble with their rhythms and harmonies, especially on “It’s the winter wind, it’s fire,” and the “ooh” rhythms that come while Midge and Mukta sing, “Is my brain reborn or is it wrecked...”
 - We ran these rhythms and harmonies both with the track and with me playing the piano until they were able to master them
 - They just need to keep rehearsing in their own time
- After that, we reviewed “Song of Forgetting”
 - Nick, Midge, and Mukta are doing an excellent job with the ending harmonies
 - My challenge to Nick was to find where Dan is singing, and where he is speaking
 - There are places in this song that do not require as full a tone
 - Additionally, I challenged Dan to think about what each memory means to him
 - How do those different emotions color his tone?

After vocal review, Dustyn took most of the cast while I worked with Brendan on “I Am The One” and “I’m Alive.”

- Brendan belted a sustained A today on “I just thought you should know, oh...” after we worked for a bit, which was thrilling
 - I used a combination of preventing his head from rocking forward, making him do a few exercises to keep his breath flowing, having him sing the line first on a “nyah,” and keeping him from overthinking the notes and getting scared
 - The key now will be recreating the sound without doing a half an hour of work to achieve it
- “I’m Alive” gets better every time I hear it
 - The beginning is controlled, many of the notes that were first challenging for Brendan are coming easily now, and even a few of the sustained belting notes are coming out more clearly now
 - The song requires stamina, so I am grateful that Brendan has been putting the time in outside rehearsal every day to work this song, even when we cannot get to it in rehearsal

Tuesday, January 31, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We began by working “Song Of Forgetting.”

- The ending harmonies have remained tight
- When we worked the song within the scene, Nick kept wanting to sing his harmony on the second chorus during the first chorus, which does not work because he has a solo in the first chorus – he needs to sing the melody
 - Nick can sing the music with ease, but when he incorporates scene work, it takes him longer to pair the two
 - He drops lines and harmonies because he is concentrating on the acting and blocking
- Another difficulty Nick is having is breaking out of the schema of the song and acting through the verses
 - When he says his lines as a monologue, it still sounds as though he is speaking in verse, instead of processing what he is actually saying
 - It is only when he can break out of this pattern that he will be able to use the music to aid his acting, instead of fighting against it

After this, we moved onto working “Hey #1-3.”

- Kyle has mastered the contemporary style of this music, but is still “singing” too much, instead of acting the song. However, I am glad that we can focus on this issue now, instead of the technical matters of vocal style.
 - When Kyle speaks his songs as monologues, the acting is genuine and exciting to watch
 - We worked on incorporating all of this into his singing
 - We also focused on physical gesture
 - Kyle has some movements habits, especially arm movements, that do not originate in character, but rather from standard “musical theatre gestures.”
 - Now that he is aware of the difference, we are working on specifying and refining this movement

Wednesday, February 1, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After warm-ups, we began with “Seconds And Years.”

- Patrick was under the weather today, so he was having more difficulty singing than usual
 - Therefore, I did not push him hard vocally, and focused on the acting instead
 - Patrick has the song notes down, but is “singing” them too much, so to speak, instead of using the music to achieve an objective or act on an intention
 - I had Nick create a reaction to start the song, to give Patrick something to work off of for rehearsal purposes
 - This made the scene more active
 - The tone of the song has to be conversational: a doctor reassuring his patients

Next, I ran “Aftershocks” with Brendan.

- Brendan has made huge strides on this songs. The notes are easy for him now, so we delved fully into the acting of it.

- There is a shift in the first verse, “You wonder which is worse – the symptom or the cure,” where Gabe’s intention changes. He becomes more dangerous, more threatening.
- We worked individual beats and changes in tactic throughout the song, clarifying and specifying moments.
 - The word “cure” versus “reprieve”
 - “With nothing to remember, is there nothing left to grieve?”
 - Is it really the memory that is causing Diana’s problems, or is it something more?

After this came “Better Than Before.”

- The biggest revelation came from our discovery that Dan’s version of “normal” is having everyone happy all the time.
 - That is why he thinks that Diana’s manic state is good – she seems happy
 - Therefore, he wants to reshape her past in this song by modifying her memories
- There is an abrupt key change after Diana begins to remember her experiences on drugs where Dan quickly cuts her off and moves forward
 - He does not want her to remember what he views as “the bad times”

Following this, I worked “A Promise” with Nick and Kyle.

- They were singing the percussive nature of the accompaniment at first, so we practiced speaking the lines as a monologue first
- We also discussed Dan’s line, “And the boy was a boy for all seasons/That boy is long lost to me now/And the man has forgotten his reasons/But the man still remembers his vow.”
 - Dan at this point does not even remember why he chooses to stay with Diana in this relationship, only that he made a promise and intends to fulfill it by sticking by her side
 - This explains why Diana leaves him at the end – she knows it is healthier for him but that he will never do it of his own accord

Thursday, February 2, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We discussed onset during warm-ups today.

- I noticed while we were doing a warm-up on the vocalise “mayo” that several of the actors did not have a clean onset
 - They were starting the sound before they opened their mouths to sing “mayo”
 - I demonstrated the difference between a clean and lazy onset, then had each actor do the exercise individually
 - A few of them had not even been aware that they were doing it, so the realization was helpful for them
 - They will now be able to catch themselves doing it

I then worked with Mukta and Patrick on “You Don’t Know (Reprise)” while Dustyn did scene work.

- The song carries the danger of falling into a “one-note” pattern of just Diana yelling at Doctor Madden, so Mukta and I worked to develop different layers to the song
 - For example, we found softer moments during “Christopher Columbus,” and a colder rage during “I don’t know where the fucking pieces go,” to avoid the song becoming repetitive and redundant.
- I also worked with Patrick to increase his status in the scene
 - As the doctor, he must work to maintain control of the situation
 - However, he was reading as lower status and uncertain in the scene
 - We found posture and line delivery to increase his power and create an interesting struggle for the upper-hand in the scene, as Diana attacks his methods

Next, I worked “How Could I Ever Forget” and “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)” with Nick and Mukta.

- Both Mukta and Nick have made huge character discoveries since we last worked these, so I was excited to see how this would change their interpretation of the music
 - Diana’s line, “How could I ever forget,” has now become more of an attack on Dan, a “How could you *let* me forget?”
 - Dan truly believes that remembering this horrible accident is the root of Diana’s mental illness
 - The song is more active now, with moments of argument and tension, and moments of togetherness
 - It is textured
- Nick and I played with the dynamics of Dan’s lines
 - Where does it make sense to crescendo?
 - Where is it better to sing in falsetto, and what does that communicate?
- I worked with Mukta to make her opening verses more conversational, as opposed to sung
 - This means incorporating more chest voice into her tone
- Even now, Dan is trying to cut Diana off
 - The six-eight measure into three-eight, a spontaneous change that implies Diana has to jump to her next thought to continue speaking
- “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)” is a lot more ominous now
 - The stakes are higher
- I found it interesting that while Dan is still singing it in the same key as the original, the music beneath him has changed to create an unsettling, dissonant tone
 - What does that say about Dan’s character?

Friday, February 3, 6:30-10:30 – Tustin Black Box

I began vocal work today with Nick, Midge, Mukta, and Kyle on “Why Stay?” and “A Promise.”

- I worked with Mukta and Midge on finding ways to differentiate the many times they ask, “Why stay?”
 - Since it is so repetitive, they have to justify each one and find reasons that the phrase is repeated so often
- Nick has a habit of drawing out the consonants on held notes instead of vowels, so we worked on correcting that
 - Otherwise, it makes him sound a bit like a pirate

I then worked with Brendan on “I’m Alive (Reprise).”

- From a technical point of view, this song is difficult in that it requires Brendan to belt a sustained A, which is higher than the range of many tenors
 - He is still holding tension in his neck and shoulders, so I worked to loosen him up by having him walk around and swing his whole body on the higher notes
 - This helped significantly
 - One of Brendan’s struggles is that he gets into his own head too much when singing, which causes him to get nervous and freeze up
- We also worked on discovering why this song occurs now in the show, and what Gabe’s intention in singing it is
 - He is no longer singing just to Diana, but to Dan as well
 - Diana has acknowledged him and let him go, so he must cling to Dan
 - “If you won’t name me, you can’t tame me...”
 - Gabe is more desperate now than he was in the first iteration of this song
 - He needs to be remembered, but he is losing his foothold in the family
 - He is like a cornered animal – even more dangerous

After this, Nick, Brendan, and I worked on “I Am The One (Reprise).”

- At this point in the show, Diana has just left Dan, and he sings, “I am the one who loved you. I am the one who stayed. I am the one, and you walked away.”
- Gabe joins him and they sing to each other, “I am the one who held you. I am the one who cried. I am the one who watched while you died.”
 - This is fascinating, because while it makes sense that Dan would sing this to Gabe, it is trickier to figure out why Gabe sings this to Dan
 - We theorized that the memory of Gabe has always been present in the house, watching over Dan, whether he chose to acknowledge him or not
- Brendan and Nick are both doing well vocally with this, which I am thrilled with
 - Brendan is mastering belting the quick A’s required of this song
 - It is also well within Nick’s range, so we have been playing with different areas to transition from full voice to falsetto

I ended by working with Mukta on “The Break.”

- This song is a marathon in that the words come so quickly it is hard to spit them out and draw breath

- As always, Mukta's challenge is maintaining control of herself as an actor even while her character loses control
- I also asked her to condense some of her large physical gesture-work into her voice
 - Huge arm movements are a safety net for her
 - Having her use her voice to punch instead will strengthen her performance

Sunday, February 5, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

After warm-ups and a review of scene work, I began with vocal work on "Maybe (Next to Normal)" with Midge and Mukta.

- Both actors have a solid grasp on the technical aspects of the piece (notes, harmonies, and rhythms), so I focused on acting through the music.
- For Mukta, we worked on incorporating more of her chest voice into the beginning of the song, to give it more of a conversational tone
 - She was using her mix for this, which sounded beautiful, but did not quite fit the tone of this difficult conversation with her daughter
- For Midge, we worked on finding different beats for Natalie within the song as she communicates her frustrations with, but also her love for, her mother
 - At what moments does she attack? When does she confide?

Later, I worked "The Break" with Mukta.

- Mukta's challenge is still her desire to use wild physical gesture when her characters get emotional, which can actually detract from an audience's connection with a performance
- We worked with the concept that an actor should be eighty percent in his or her character, and twenty percent in control as a performer during the show, to prevent this from happening
- I used a paper-folding exercise with her
 - While singing, she had to concentrate on folding a piece of paper into a paper airplane
 - This kept her hands busy and actually helped her find more nuance in the music
 - After this exercise, Mukta told me that she found the song had settled in more, now that she had to concentrate on Diana's words

Monday, February 6, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

Our first hour of rehearsal today was dedicated to vocal work and review, in anticipation of our first full run-through for the design team.

- I spent most of this time reviewing large group numbers
- "It's Gonna Be Good" and "Wish I Were Here" are still the ones that require the most help, due to their difficult harmonies and rhythms
 - For "It's Gonna Be Good," I continued drilling the opening harmonies, and the timing for the "Ring-a-ling" section, which Patrick and Brendan consistently have trouble entering on

- For “Wish I Were Here,” I focused mainly on the men, who are mixing up which harmonic passages occur where in the music
 - We also worked on counting the seven-eight meter portion
 - Since it is not an intuitive time signature, it requires more practice to do naturally

We then performed the entirety of the show for the designers, so that they could begin to plan lighting and sound cues, as well as consider costumes, set pieces, and props needed for each scene. The run was also crucial for Dustyn and myself; it allowed us to see areas that still needed work, transitions that needed to be ironed out, and moments that needed refining. My notes for this run were as follows.

- “Just Another Day”
 - Mukta was flat on “And you lied...”
 - The actors are missing the timing for the “Bum, bum bum” harmony section
 - I will drill this with them after the run
- “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I”
 - Nick needs to work on singing through the phrases of the song and using crescendos and decrescendos through his held notes
 - We need to refresh harmonies and rhythms during the jazz scatting portions
 - The actors are struggling to sing and dance at the same time
 - They are so focused on getting the choreography down that they are forgetting to sing
 - Patrick entered early on “Use may be fatal”
 - Nick needs to refresh his lyrics towards the end of the song
- “Perfect For You”
 - Kyle was a little sharp on “Our planet is poisoned,” but corrected himself
 - The tempo was rushed tonight, which will not work with a prerecorded track
 - A live orchestra could speed up to follow Kyle, but he needs to keep the tempo for the tracks we are using
- “It’s Gonna Be Good”
 - Similarly to “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” the actors have not reached a point where they are comfortable enough with the choreography to sing and dance at the same time
 - As a result, this song was a bit of a mess today
- “You Don’t Know/I Am The One”
 - Brendan entered early during his and Nick’s riffing portion
 - Mukta began to lose control of her voice during the end of this song
- “I’m Alive”
 - Brendan is still pushing his head too far forward when he sings, which is cutting off the sound

- He also confused the riffing in this piece with that of the reprise, which threw him off a few times
- He needs to support from his diaphragm area
- “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling”
 - Patrick is “singing” the beginning of this song too much
 - It needs to be more conversational
 - He rushed the timing of the first “make up your mind”
 - Midge is having trouble entering the “she’s not there” section on time
 - The timing of the final “catch me I’m falling” needs to be coordinated
 - The actors were taking liberties with the rhythms, which would work for a solo, but not for a piece that four people sing together
- “There’s A World”
 - Brendan dropped some lyrics tonight and switched verses around
- “Didn’t I See This Movie?”
 - Mukta is struggling to hit the final riff on “I walked out...”
 - We might adjust it, as the score calls for an ad lib here anyway
- “A Light In The Dark”
 - Nick again needs to sing through the phrases here and sing on his voice
 - I will review Mukta’s harmony on “It’s like nothing I’ve known” with her
- “Wish I Were Here”
 - This is another number in which the men struggled to sing and perform the choreography at the same time
 - We will continue to drill this until it becomes comfortable
- “Hey #1”
 - The tempo was rushed during the build in intensity
- “Aftershocks”
 - Brendan again struggled with lyrics for this song
- “Hey #2”
 - The tempo was also rushed during the build
- “It’s Gonna Be Good (Reprise)”
 - Nick and Mukta had trouble finding the timing and rhythm for the ending portion
 - They need to keep singing through the end of the music
- “Finale (Light)”
 - The actors sounded like they were only half-singing during this
 - We will work on proper vocal support and blend when we work this tomorrow

Tuesday, February 7, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

Today, we began with work on Finale (Light).

- I concentrated on blend and dynamics for this
 - We added several crescendos, decrescendos, and sforzandos

- For the final note, we also coordinated when the actors would transition from a straight tone to vibrato
- We also discussed the energy needed to sing at different dynamics for the piece
 - In order to effectively sing softly, the vocalist must actually use more energy to properly maintain the note and its intensity
 - This was crucial for the “Let it, let it...” section, which felt very low energy the first time we ran it

After this, I worked on “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling (Reprise)” with Mukta, Patrick, and Brendan.

- I focused mostly on Patrick while working, as he was struggling the most to act through the song and still maintain his character while doing so
- Fortunately, once we ran this number in the scene, he found the urgency necessary to make the scene and the lyrics believable

Following this, we began our work-through of the show, which will last for the rest of this week.

- During this part of the work-through, we focused mainly on the opening number of the show, “Just Another Day”
 - The hardest part of this song for the actors is timing their vamps, several of which occur under dialogue and give no aural cue as to when the vamp has ended and the song is continuing
 - I am currently working with our lighting designer to see if we can time a visual light cue for the actor as an indication that the vamp is ending
- Nick had some trouble hitting his higher belted notes today, which has not happened before. The notes sounded strained, which could be due to fatigue or a lingering illness that has been going around the cast

Wednesday, February 8, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

We continued our work-through today, through page 31 of the libretto, which is the end of “Superboy And The Invisible Girl.”

- The cast is still struggling to sing and move to “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” which means that I will focus on this during our vocal and movement review workshop on Friday
- Kyle and Midge were having trouble timing their dialogue before “Superboy And The Invisible Girl,” running out of underscoring before the song begins
 - After the work-through, I stayed behind with them to practice running through the underscoring a few times so that they had the opportunity to get used to it
 - This mostly involved having Kyle pick up his cues a little more quickly, instead of taking his time between Natalie and Henry’s lines
- Fortunately, “You Don’t Know/I Am The One” is sounding very tight both vocally and in terms of acting

- Brendan and Nick are blending very well during the chorus, and Mukta is maintaining vocal control even as Diana spirals out of control

Thursday, February 9, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

We continued our work-through today.

- Both Dustyn and I worked intensively with Patrick today to differentiate Doctor Madden from Doctor Fine
 - His characterization and physicalization of Doctor Fine has developed incredibly well, so the key here is to find a distinct physicalization of Doctor Madden
 - Patrick is struggling with the idea of status in the show
 - As a professional, Doctor Madden must maintain status when dealing with his patient, Diana, and with Dan
 - Right now, he is too quickly giving up status in the scene, which deflates tension and does not fit his character
 - We worked on how to take status in a scene instead, through both dialogue and physicality
 - After this, “Seconds And Years” and “Better Than Before” came together much more solidly

I worked with Brendan as well on “I’m Alive.”

- He is still stressed about belting the many G notes that the song requires, and placing them correctly
- I focused on helping him find the backspace required to sustain this vocally demanding song
 - This must be achieved through proper breathing and vowel placement
 - To correctly to do, I had him imagine the song bouncing off the back of his skull and ricocheting forward
 - This imagery helped him create a rounder sound
- After working for about half an hour, he was able to find the correct placement for the note
 - The key now will be consistency -- can he do this every time while also acting and moving through the song?

Friday, February 10, 6:30-10:30 -- Tustin Black Box

Today was dedicated solely to reviewing vocal and movement work. After warm-up, I began with the full cast number, “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I.”

- We focused largely on diction for this number
 - While the actors were singing the correct notes, it was almost impossible to understand what they were saying because they were not enunciating enough during the group portions

- When singing in a group, it is necessary to over-enunciate the words to make them understandable to an audience
- Once the cast did this, not only did the words become clearer, the entire song became more energized as well

Next, I worked on “It’s Gonna Be Good” with the full cast.

- This is still proving to be the most difficult number of the show
- Kyle is struggling to find his opening note, which is a third down from the note given by the accompaniment at the top of the song
 - We drilled this multiple times until he could reliably hit it
- The men are also having trouble holding their parts throughout the song
 - After running it a few times, it slips back into their memory, but as I explained to them, during the show they will only have one chance to get it right. It needs to be consistent

Following this, I worked on “Wish I Were Here,” primarily with the men, who sing complicated background harmonies under Diana and Natalie’s solos.

- We made huge progress with this song today
- First, I worked on timbre with the men
 - I explained again the concept of using crescendos through the phrases, which improved the intensity and quality of sound throughout the song
 - I also worked on forward placement with their belts, which also made the song pop further
- The hardest part of the song for them is remembering at which point each background section happens
 - A lot of them sound similar, but with crucial differences
 - We drilled these to get them into muscle memory
- We ran this number with movement afterwards, and while still not perfect, it is a lot stronger and will continue to improve over the next couple weeks

After this, I worked on “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling,” again with the entire cast.

- A lot of this work involved touch-ups, fine-tuning specific moments
- For example, I had Midge, Kyle, and Nick land a contrasting forte on the “you know” line of “Love, I know you know,” which made the moment pop and underscored Dan’s frustration boiling through at this moment
- Later in the song, Kyle had been singing the line, “she’s not there” in falsetto. As soon as I worked with him to land it in full voice, that line of the song popped to life with the harmonies surrounding it
 - Again, the full voice was vital to highlight Natalie’s cry of fury and pain as she longs for her parents to notice her
- Finally, we worked on the diction of the final moments, “Catch me I’m falling...”

- Once the actors worked to over-enunciate their words, this moment again popped to life

I finished by working on the final belting notes of “Superboy And The Invisible Girl” with Midge.

- Midge was having trouble placing the high belting moments correctly in her voice
- I explained that when women high belt, we actually have to incorporate some of our head voice into the belt in order to maintain proper vocal placement, so that it does not sound like we are screaming
- To achieve this, I had her squat against a wall and place the back of her head against the wall as she sang
 - This forces the body to maintain proper alignment and engage the correct muscles
- While she is still not totally there, she is getting more confident in placing her belt in the proper place now
 - It also sounds more free and released

Sunday, February 12, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

Due to a family emergency concerning one of our cast members, I spent the first part of rehearsal with that cast member. After this, I returned to help finish out the work-through of the show.

- Most of Act II is sounding clean and is working well
- My biggest concern, surprisingly, is “Finale (Light),” which was the first number we worked on
 - While the notes, rhythms, and lyrics are all technically correct, it is lacking the energy required to deliver a finale number effectively
 - The actors seem like they are “half-singing” for much of the number, even at the forte sections
 - While this may be a problem that simply having an audience will remedy, I am unwilling to wait for opening night to test this theory
 - I worked with them on harnessing this kind of energy through technique, even when it does not always feel emotionally “in the moment” for them

Monday, February 13, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After warm up, I began by running “Just Another Day,” “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” and “Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling” before we ran Act I.

- For “Who’s Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist And I,” I worked largely on diction and energy
 - When Brendan, Midge, Kyle, and Dan take on the role of “background voices,” they tend to lose both their facial and vocal expressiveness
 - I worked with them to bring that color back into their voices

- Kyle and Nick still have a tendency to swing the eighth notes of “Diarrhea, constipation, nervous laughter, palpitations...” which is causing them to enter late on “Anxiousness, anger...”
 - We drilled straight eighth notes for a bit to fix this habit
- For “Catch Me I’m Falling,” I tightened up some stray harmony notes
 - Brendan was singing a minor chord harmony on “catch me I’m falling for good” when he needed to be singing a major harmony
 - Mukta also was singing a third harmony on “falling” when it actually called for a fourth
- In “Just Another Day,” I also tightened up several sections
 - Brendan and Mukta were both forgetting to sing on “bum bum bum”
 - Additionally, Nick was dropping his, “And you wish you could be going but you stay” line
 - We also discussed urgency in terms of this song
 - I need to believe that “it hurts”

After this, we worked through all of Act I, stopping and starting as needed.

- “Just Another Day” is still missing the necessary energy towards the end

Tuesday, February 14, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We ran Act I without stopping today.

- Mukta was on vocal rest, meaning that she was vocally fatigued so we decided to not have her sing full out today

My notes for Act I were as follows.

- General reminder about mics and talking backstage.
- If you are marking, you need to tell me.
- **Everything Else**
- All of the technical elements are there
- Now let’s bring back that element of discovery
- **Who’s Crazy/Psycho**
- Mukta: bring back the “name” crescendo
- Give me face on “doo”
- Crescendo on “ah”
- We’re still running out of time on “just not fair”
- Patrick better timing on use may be fatal

It’s Gonna Be Good

- Diction needs to be stronger

Here/You Don’t Know/I Am The One

- “He’s not here” ends on an unresolved tone, implying that Gabe might still be here somehow
 - First inkling that Dan might notice him too

I'm Alive

- You missed the first “I’m Alive” riff mid section

Make Up Your Mind/Catch Me I’m Falling

- Patrick late for “Open the door”
- Let the “you know” be a cry of frustration Nick
- I need a bigger build to justify the “she’s not there” cry

I’ve Been

- There’s a change on “I know they won’t though -- not a single word”
- Let that carry you into the chorus

Wednesday, February 15, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box**After warming up, we ran “It’s Gonna Be Good” and “My Psychopharmacologist And I.”**

- Even though we were working Act II, those two numbers will need to be run every day between now and opening night to ensure that they are strong, since they are two of the more difficult numbers of the show in terms of putting vocals to movement
- “It’s Gonna Be Good” is getting stronger every time we run it
 - The harmonies are finally in place without me having to refresh them every time we work on this number
 - The movement is also getting tighter
 - Diction is the major problem left for this number: the actors need stronger consonants on all of their words, especially since the words happen so rapidly
 - The audience will not understand them otherwise
- “My Psychopharmacologist And I” is getting tighter as well
 - We worked on injecting joy and humor into the voices of the background voices as they list off pills and side effects
 - Overall, their expressions need to be bigger and more cartoonish
 - Kyle and Nick are still swinging the eighth notes of “diarrhea, constipation, nervous laughter, palpitations...” which is causing them to enter late for “anxiousness, anger...”
 - I drilled the straight eighth notes with them for a bit to get it into their systems

Following this, we worked through Act II of the show.

Thursday, February 16, 2:30-4:00pm – Weis Music Building

Kyle requested to meet with me outside of rehearsal to work on some of his more difficult pieces.

- For “My Psychopharmacologist And I,” we worked his harmonies during the “doo” section, and his rhythms for the straight eighth notes
- For “Perfect For You,” we again worked on his contemporary sound

- Some of his lyric lines still have the rounded classical quality that we have mostly moved away from
- In “Catch Me I’m Falling,” we practiced his belted, “She’s not there.”
 - We added more resonance to the tone, and I had him focus on supporting the sound using his stomach muscles
- We then ran through “Hey #1-3”
 - We worked on rhythm and timing for some of his lyric lines, which are veering a bit too far away from what is written
 - Kyle is also again getting a bit too classical in the tone of some of his lines

Thursday, February 16, 6:30-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

After warm up, we started again by running “It’s Gonna Be Good,” along with “Wish I Were Here.”

- “It’s Gonna Be Good” still needs stronger diction
 - Brendan also dropped his “good” rhythm towards the end of the number tonight
 - We ran it again to ensure that this was a one-time mistake
- The vocals of “Wish I Were Here” are very strong now
 - It is crucial that we run this number every day, though, because when we add movement, the men tend to drop some of their vocal lines

Following this, we ran Act II without stopping. My notes to the actors on this run can be found in Appendix 13.

After the run, we worked on individual numbers that needed more attention.

- For “Song of Forgetting,” we worked on activating the number so that it was not as internal for Dan, especially
 - Where are the contrasting beats? Where can there be joy?
- For “I’m Alive (Reprise),” we focused on discovering moments of stillness for Gabe within all of the action

Friday, February 17, 6:00-10:30pm – Tustin Black Box

We started a half-hour early today to incorporate microphones into the show for the first time.

- Our audio coordinators fitted each actor with a microphone and microphone pack, and then ran sound-check for them individually
- This added a new element for the actors, some of whom would be hearing harmonies they had never noticed before, and who would have to be careful of knocking the microphones during scenes

After sound-check, we ran the show using full sound equipment for the first time.

- This was a difficult run

- Possibly due to the new elements we added tonight, the actors were distracted, dropping lyrics, forgetting harmonies, and struggling to maintain character throughout the run
- Many of the notes that Dustyn and I took during this run were notes we had given several times before as well
 - This was, of course, frustrating
- The actors could also sense that the run was going poorly, which further affected their performances
- Due to this, after the run ended we chose not to give notes this evening
 - Doing so would only further lower morale
 - Instead, we typed up our notes and will email them to the actors tomorrow to incorporate into the run on Sunday

Sunday, February 19, 1:00-10:30 pm – Tustin Black Box

Today was our cue-to-cue rehearsal.

- A cue-to-cue rehearsal adds several technical elements, including lights and sound, to the acting for the first time
 - It is known as a “cue-to-cue” because instead of doing a full run-through of the show, we stop and start at every cue change, be it lights or music, to solidify the technical elements throughout the performance
 - This is a slow and challenging process, which is why we always allot a full Sunday to complete it

We worked Act I from 1:00 until 5:00.

- Ultimately, most of the notes that I took for the actors during this portion were notes that I had previously given them
- Hopefully, the reason for this was because we were doing a disjointed cue-to-cue instead of a full run
 - They might not have been in the correct headspace to recall all of their notes and corrections

We took an hour break for dinner, then worked Act II from 6:00 until 9:00.

- Act II went better than Act I in terms of the actors working through their notes and corrections. However, we still have work to do before we open.

Appendix 9

Production Poster

Designed by Adrienne Beaver



Appendix 10

Music Director's Program Notes

Musically, *Next to Normal* is unique. While classified as a pop-rock show, its style ventures into jazz waltzes, doo-wops, and even folk ballads. The score's lack of a unified form is part of what drew me to *Next to Normal*. In the words of composer Tom Kitt, "The story always drove the music." With lyricist Brian Yorkey, Kitt developed each song with the style of music he found necessary to tell the Goodmans' story at that point in the show.

This approach, in which content influences form, presented me with an exciting challenge in terms of music direction. The integrated nature of the score, in which song blends seamlessly into scene, meant that I was looking at far more than vocal technique and harmonies while working with the cast. Over the course of our rehearsal process, we explored why particular styles were used for each song, why certain melodies were paired with specific lyric lines, how a specific chord progression might inform a character's intention and emotional state and affect an actor's interpretation of the piece. We played with timbre, dynamics, and tone. And of course, we looked at how each song is used to further the story of the Goodman family.

A musical is, above all, a collaborative process. Without Professor Dustyn Martincich's willingness to jump aboard as stage director, and her commitment to forging a cohesiveness between the stage and music direction of our show, I would never have gotten this project off the ground. Similarly, our cast's eagerness to dive into this adventure with me, their keen investigation of their characters through the music of the show, and their commitment to doing this story justice, is nothing short of astounding.

I hope you enjoy what we have created together in this space. We are honored to share this remarkable show with you.

-Alex Golden

Appendix 11

Bucknellian Interview on *Next to Normal*

Written by Madison Weaver, Assistant News Editor

Published March 2, 2017

Mental illness and suburban life were the prevailing themes of the Theatre and Dance department's pop-rock rendition of "Next to Normal." The show ran from Feb. 24—27 in the Tustin Studio Theatre. Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance Dustyn Martincich served as the director of the musical. Alex Golden '17 was in charge of the show's music direction.

The "Next to Normal" cast starred Mukta Phatak '18, Brendan Trybus '18, Nick Talbot '19, Midge Zuk '19, Kyle Cohick '20, Patrick Newhart '18, Emma Miller '20, and Franz Schauer '20.

The show follows the lives of the Goodman family, detailing the mother's struggle with bipolar disorder after the loss of her child and how the family attempts to cope with her illness. "Next to Normal" does not shy away from addressing important issues such as mental illness, grief, drug use, suicide, marriage and relationships, and the complexities of family relationships.

Golden was pleased by how the musical brings these problems into the spotlight.

"Mental illness is a topic constantly brushed under the rug in everyday life. For me, this show was a way to bring these discussions out into the open, and to show that these are things that 'normal' people deal with," Golden said.

Golden discussed her unique experience in "Next to Normal," as a student has never music directed a Mainstage theater event. After persistent discussions and proposals, Golden was able to act as the music director for the piece as her honors thesis and senior independent study.

"If even one person saw the show and came away from it saying, 'Someone out there gets me. Maybe I'm not alone in this,' I will have done my job," Golden said.

For the last two showings, Golden filled in for Talbot as the character Dan, the father of the family, while reading from the script book.

"When I got the call on Sunday morning that I would be filling in, I knew there was no way I would be able to recreate [Talbot's] nuanced, complex performance in a matter of hours ... my greatest challenge was figuring out how to be there for my actors in an emotionally demanding show, stepping in for an actor they had become comfortable working with in that context, in a short period of time," Golden said.

All of the actors on stage delivered powerful performances, exploring family life and mental illness through the relatable characters and pop rock songs throughout the show.

“[The actors’] professionalism and trust in me carried the show. I could not have done it without them,” Golden said. “It is very rare, as a student music director, to walk into a rehearsal and feel nothing but support and trust from your cast every single day.”

Appendix 12

Actor Post-Production Surveys

In order to assess my success in this endeavor, and to evaluate what worked in my process and what needed revision, I requested that each actor complete a post-production survey. In the surveys, I asked the actors to describe their experience with the rehearsal process, to determine in what ways they had grown vocally and as actors, and to pinpoint the most valuable lesson they had taken away from the process. I used these surveys to assist me in writing this section, and to determine how effective my techniques actually were to the actors.

Name: Midge Zuk

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

Starting from the first rehearsal, Goldie created a joyful and supportive yet focused and disciplined environment. Since our cast was already close friends with each other and with her, she had the added difficulty of wrangling our craziness, and she always knew when to let us indulge in levity and when to guide us back to hard work. Dustyn followed a similar pattern when we started working with her after spring break, and since Goldie and Dustyn seemed to be on the exact same page, our cast could experiment and explore with either of them and know that the progress made would translate to the others' vision, instead of being looked at as a detriment or "going behind" the other director. Instead, since Goldie and Dustyn were so supportive of one another and equally collaborative, we were able to progress and grow much faster than I have ever experienced in other production settings, where the music director only cares how the cast sounds and stays out of the acting and the director does not know how to balance acting choices with vocal health. These two created an absolute dream team, and their support of each other and all of us is the only reason this show had any success.

This support from the creative team helped our cast grow together as well, which was crucial when handling such a heavy and sensitive show. Through Dustyn and Goldie's gentle balancing act of hilarity and seriousness throughout rehearsals, we were able to work with the most intense scenes as easily as possible, without breaking down and crying every 20 minutes (which we very well could have, given the material). With our fearless leaders at the head constantly offering to talk outside of rehearsal or help create rituals to "get out of the show" (separate the characters from ourselves in order to protect ourselves from the baggage of the characters), we knew we could really dive into the material, without fear of hurting ourselves or another actor. Again, when people compliment the depth of understanding of the characters and situations within the musical, know that this was only possible due to Goldie and Dustyn.

The support didn't just stop in rehearsal, however; since we as a cast were dedicating so much time to the show (we all practiced at least an hour a day outside of rehearsal, limited our diets for maximum vocal and physical health, and often visited the steam room together), and this led to

us bonding even more after rehearsals, when we would forego traditional campus weekend activities to take over Perkins or Applebees to inhale half-priced apps and joke around as an ensemble (by “ensemble” I mean Goldie, Genna, and the stage management team (Dustyn was always invited but often had other priorities i.e. her newborn child)). The people involved with the show became my absolute ride-or-die best friends onstage and off; we all depended upon one another in so many ways that it was impossible to separate us. Having these all-team bonding nights created a positive family atmosphere that helped us work seamlessly together, I am incredibly grateful for it in so many ways, but I was especially grateful for those nights when we had our pre-matinee meeting that fateful Sunday.

Going into the shows, our cast was highly concerned that we were not going to do our best, and the thought of letting our incredible directors down broke our hearts. We called ourselves in for an added rehearsal the Saturday before tech and ran through the problem numbers over and over, nit-picking ourselves to follow all of the notes we had been given and asking each other for advice and ideas on moments that we felt had never landed. It seems so silly now, but those extra two hours on that Saturday really helped us ease our minds going into tech. And while tech was still stressful and we never felt that the show really landed before our first performance, we knew we had something really, really special and that an audience was the missing link to our success. By giving us both the dress rehearsal and the donation-only preview to do the show with an audience, Goldie and Dustyn pushed the show to be its very best by the time we got to Friday’s performance, as we were technically two shows in when we got to opening night. This is just another example of how they knew what we needed and worked to provide it so that we could benefit as actors and as people.

The shows on Friday and Saturday were a perfect example of how our support as an ensemble was a crucial ingredient to this show’s success. Despite technical difficulties or the feeling of personal failure, we relied on one another to pull ourselves out of our actor heads and continue to focus on our duty as performers to share the story with the audience. For example, I personally never really felt like “Everything Else” landed the way I wanted it to; coming out of “Just Another Day”, I usually felt really out of breath, and then would get frustrated when I would focus too much on the singing and lose the storytelling. However, I then would sit facing backwards and frozen on the piano bench throughout the entire opening of “Who’s Crazy/ My Psychopharmacologist...”, and hearing Mukta crush that song gave me the confidence I needed to pull myself out of my own critical head and back into Natalie. As we passed each other backstage, we’d squeeze sweaty hands or pat each other on the back, always reminding each other that we would not let the other fall. Goldie would come down at intermission and calm our ever-present fears that we weren’t doing a good enough job and tell us that the audience was loving it. All of our bonding during the rehearsal process became visible and necessary during the run of the shows.

Which is why Sunday morning's news, while devastating, was not disastrous. While Nick obviously had a major role on our team, as did everyone, due to the incredible strength of our network, we knew we could still perform the show and that Goldie would seamlessly fit right into the role of Dan. Although Goldie was not technically part of the original cast, since we had bonded so much as a complete ensemble, it didn't really matter; we had the same immense trust in her that we had in Nick, and we knew she felt the same way, so we could rely on her to pull us through just as we had with Nick and it would all still be successful. With the foundation of hard work and endlessly deep character exploration, thanks to both Dustyn and Goldie, we could re-shape the show to see how our characters would interact when Dan had different qualities and traits, which allowed us to still have a believable family and tell the story successfully. Working with this curveball forced us to all grow even closer and cherish the time we had together even more, which I honestly didn't know was possible until it happened.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

This show taught me how to act. It sounds insane, but it's true. And the only reason I could act is because I finally learned how to marry singing and acting into one art form, instead of thinking of the two separately, which is all thanks to Goldie. By helping us find musical hints and messages that are interspersed throughout the score, Goldie taught us so much more about our characters than we ever would have known ourselves, as none of us are as well-versed in anything musical as she is. Because of her, we had an extra key to character exploration, and by combining what we knew musically with what we were exploring with Dustyn in the libretto, we could embody these characters in every aspect, whether we were singing a solo where all eyes were on us or sitting on a separate part of stage while prioritized action occurred elsewhere.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

This process re-taught me how much work needs to go into a show in order for it to be truly successful. While I spent my high school shows being forced to score my script for homework and spending late nights trying to find the perfect verb for every line in a song, the work for this show came from honest passion for the story and the people involved, which is why we all worked SO hard. Any success we had as actors came because we had detailed every single image with Goldie and Dustyn, allowing us to live realistic human lives onstage instead of schmacting our way to the big dramatic beats. While we had so much fun in rehearsals (and out of rehearsals), we were also working so, so hard.

Name: Mukta Phatak

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

We rehearsed 6 nights a week for 4 hours each night. Personally, I needed every one of them. Luckily, because of my amazing co-actors, there was never a rehearsal that went to waste. Every day, I discovered something new about Diana, or something nuanced about a relationship she had with another character. I had challenges, no doubt, one of which was staying mentally healthy in the process. A few weeks in, I started to freak out because I would go home from rehearsal ready to unwind and do some homework, but Diana's voice would not leave my head. So, I started having a separate set of clothing for rehearsal, and I would go through a ritual every night to enter and exit the space. Another challenge was physicalizing the mental state of Diana. While I would initially go through scenes feeling emotionally everything Diana was feeling, I would only put myself there mentally, and would not send that energy out. I would leave scenes feeling emotionally exhausted, and not having given anything to my fellow actors. That's not good. So, I focused on physicalizing what I was feeling, and that got easier.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

Vocally, I grew very much. I started to understand the intricacies of singing and acting at the same time. One exercise that was particularly helpful was distracting my mind and hands with a different task, like folding a fortune teller, while singing a song. I did this with "The Break", and it changed everything about that piece for me. It allowed me to let go of the high energy destructive force that I was initially acting upon, which was a surface level incidental energy, and I accessed the core distress that was prevalent in the scene; a quieter, more desperate lucidity.

Another helpful tip was understanding that the orchestration is there to tell a story as well, and our job as actors is to tell a different layer of the story, rather than echoing the orchestration. It is an added treat when the audience can hear the subtext and the surface text in a package of voice and orchestration.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

Personally, as an actor, this process gave me wings. I started to trust myself as an actor, I allowed myself to take risks with a cast that I knew would catch me and bounce me back, because I knew I would do the same for any of them. Craft-wise, it was important for me to realize how to stay vocally healthy for the duration of a full run-through. Two acts as Diana is vocally taxing, and reminding my actor-self of that during shows was very important and something I learned to work with. Sometimes, when you conserve yourself vocally, you are forced to make stronger acting choices physically, or you have to justify a choice to not belt a note full-out.

I also took away an amazing sense of gratitude. I am eternally lucky and grateful and in awe of how many lovely lovely people I got to work with on Next to Normal. It was a formative experience for me. I will refer back to the moments and learnings I gained from this process. I love everyone that was involved with the production, and I learned that ensemble is paramount. Our show could not have been what it was had we not all leaned in to each other, and trusted each other so completely. Truly, it would have been a completely different show. Perhaps still excellent, but not the depths that we were able to reach together. Ultimately, the final leap is one of intuition and trust. It is a soft good, while craft and preparation are the hard goods. And this show had that. I never want to do another show where we don't establish that sort of ensemble, that's what I took away from this process.

Name: Kyle Cohick

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

I played Henry in Bucknell's production of *Next to Normal*, which was music directed by one, Alex Golden. The rehearsal process started I believe in late November/ early December with music rehearsals. These rehearsals consisted for the most part of four hour rehearsals just about every week night where the six of us in the cast and Goldie and Lauren Scott, the ASM, would sit in a classroom in the Weiss Music Building and dedicate our time to learning the parts. We didn't even talk about character at that point, the goal was solely to learn the music and to start making the music second nature. These rehearsals were incredible productive and on task almost 99% of the time, and yet I still felt like they were intimate and I began to start bonding with the cast.

At the end of winter break we moved into rehearsing in the space. Before we even started using the black box, we began in the adjoining dance room, focusing on finding the characters and defining who they are. Dustin, our faculty acting director, did a ton of exercises to help us accomplish this task such as movement based tableaux, body outlines, character biographies, and timeline production. The movement based tableaux and the other movement work was especially important in the process I think because it let the cast really start to interact in a trial by fire kind of way. We were just basically thrown into this very vague task and told to interact and creating a meaningful communication and that's where I think a lot of the walls that people inherently have up began to come down a little bit.

Then we began work in the space and delving into the scenes and the dialogue and how deliver the songs. We worked things a ton of ways. Sometimes we would just go into a scene and do it once and feel what felt natural. Then Dustin would come in and give us direction of where to go acting wise. Other times with songs Goldie would have us talk through dialogue and go through line by line so we could understand everything that we were saying and why we were saying it. She was very big on two things: One contemporary sound and two the purpose of these songs in the show. Goldie repeatedly stressed to us that because of the dearth of dialogue in the show, the songs took the place of those scenes and for all intents and purposes the songs were just scenes set to music. She made it clear that the music was there to help tell the story and not just as ornamentation and I couldn't have been happier about that.

Movement was then handled by a third director, Genna Hartnett. She worked with us to create movement and gesture based choreography to go along with the scenes and find consistent character mannerisms to play throughout the show.

Finally, all of this was brought together in the final show which was one of the coolest experiences of my rather inexperienced life so far. The first two performances were awesome,

but then when Nick fell ill, I was blindsided. I was so worried both about Nick and the show, but Goldie coming in saved the performance. She barely needed the book because she had been with us for every step of the journey over the three months of rehearsals and she played the part brilliantly. Even if that hadn't happened though and Nick had done all four shows, the show just had this way of being different every night. If I had to place it somewhere it would have been in the liveliness of the characters and the sporadic nature of the show that caused constant shifts in the directions of scenes and just different things clicked differently every night, but they clicked nonetheless. Altogether, it was a process I was very thankful to Goldie for giving me the opportunity to be a part of.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

I grew so much over the process of this show. Goldie is a fantastic musician and teacher and because of her I feel like a much stronger performer both vocally and acting wise. I spent all of my high school career singing classically and mostly as part of larger ensemble. So, the fact that Goldie showed me how to take my training and apply it to a contemporary sound both in pronunciation of words and also in placement of sound, that's just something I'm really thankful for. As an actor at the end of this process I think I experienced a lot of new things as an actor. I played a character who is like me but also something I've never quite played before. The relationship I had on stage was something that I've never quite achieved before and the handling of intimacy work was so well done on Dustin's part that I think the Henry/ Natalie relationship flourished on stage.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

My biggest takeaway is the fact that the only difference between people who are doing huge awesome productions and making these huge projects happen is drive. Goldie made all of this happen and she's been working to make it happen for about a year and a half now, probably longer, and at the end she had something truly special. I want to thank her for showing me that.

Name: Nicholas Talbot

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

Very positive. Rehearsals were well organized and meaningful explorations of music and character. All elements of the musical were interconnected in rehearsal (music informed acting and vice versa). Also they were very fun and relaxed.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

I grew as an actor in finding truthful basis for movement and reaction onstage. I grew as a vocalist in better connecting lyric with music. Specifically, growing or shrinking dynamic on held notes and phrasing.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

The value of working in a highly connected ensemble.

Name: Patrick Newhart

Please describe your experience with rehearsals and performances for this production.

This experience was completely a brand-new experience and I enjoyed every moment of it. Coming in, I was honestly nervous. I was the only member of the cast (including the music director) that had no professional training and very little acting/theatre experience. I had only done one show in the past, with my only vocal experience being a recreational acapella group – so I was very intimidated by my cast mates. However, as the process went on, every person came to become more and more supportive of one another, and I had found support and encouragement from everyone. I must say, rehearsals and performances were incredibly professional, but never did I feel unhappy that I had decided to take up this project as a recreational activity for non-professional growth. Every time we were together as an ensemble, a safe, friendly and fun environment was created which encouraged collaboration and support from one another, all while being efficient and meaningful in our use of our time together. The performances were also incredibly rewarding. By the end of the process, I felt so connected to the material and the cast/crew that I had total faith and trust in what we were doing.

In what ways did you grow as an actor and/or vocalist through this process?

I have immensely grown in my ability to have confidence in myself and my ability to make daring choices on impulse and heart rather than reason. At the beginning, I was always second guessing myself, a little nervous of being judged by these people who have clearly had years of training and practice perfecting their skills, but they showed me that there is no harm in being yourself and taking risks in choices. I think in addition to confidence, I have also grown immensely with technique from singing and character development. I have gotten so much more insight on character development and was able to spend a lot of time with the music director developing proper singing techniques, and learning the nuances in producing different quality vocals.

What was your biggest takeaway from the rehearsal process?

My biggest takeaway, to quote High School Musical, was that “we’re all in this together”. Honestly, I have never been more connected to a group of people working toward a common goal. There was so much love and support for one another to grow and to create a unique show. This is an experience that I will always have with me and never take for granted.